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THE BURDEN BEARER

AN EPIC OF LINCOLN

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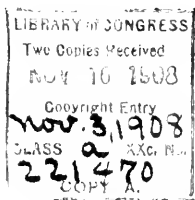
FRANCIS HOWARD WILLIAMS



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TO MY WIFE

BOOK FIRST

THE BURDEN BEARER

BOOK FIRST

I

Of sturdy English stock the Linkhorns came,
People of Norfolk, seeking in the new
For what the old denied,—a human right
To labor and to worship in God's world
Untrammeled save by conscience and the fear
Of one sole Maker.

So John Linkhorn came
To plant his crops in Pennsylvania soil
And gather fruit beneath Virginia sun;
And after him came Abraham in turn,
Migrating to Kentucky's distant fields;
And after Abraham, Thomas,—he whose ways
Were never thrifty, though his heart was set

To cozen fortune whose averted face
Shone never on him. Slow of gait was he,
Stoop-shouldered, pausing ever for a jest,
Hard-handed, capable of labor, nor
Striving to shun it when it came his way,
Though scarce alert to seek it out.

His friends,—

And he had many,—called him Shiftless Tom,—
Tom Lincoln, who could make a joint at need
And do such carpentry as few could match,
Yet all unlettered. Patient at his bench
Within the shop of Joseph Hanks he wrought,
And saw the months glide into years and all
The years to bootless issues. Yet a web
Was being spun about his life to lead
To undreamed destinies. For Tom saw oft
His gentle cousin, daughter of the man
Who paid him his scant wage. And Nancy's eyes,
Resting at first complacent on the gaunt
And stooping form at Joseph Hanks's bench,
Little by little took a softer light
And conjured up strange images whereof

They two became a portion. And at last
He spoke, all awkwardly and ill at ease,
Fashioning his untaught phrase to tell his love,—
Unlettered, rough, yet eloquent. And she
Quite understood and loved him that he failed,—
Quite took into her heart his futile trial
To make his plea a poesy; and so
She gave her promise to become his wife.

Time's wheel turns slowly, but at last the day
Set for the marriage came, and Jesse Head,
Exhorter, preacher, and the friend of both,
With ceremony due made these two one
In eyes of God and man.

And Nancy faced
The stern reality of coming trials
With faith which knew no faltering.

Sweet was she
In all the winning ways of womanhood,
Too timid haply for the turbulent stress
Of stern and rugged days. Within her veins
The blood of those who once serenely dwelt

In English Malmsbury flowed inviolate,
And something of the mystic Stonehenge hung
About her presence. Soft and vagrant winds
Whispered their earliest carols to the child
Who knew no struggle till a ruthless world
Startled her sense and dashed her striving life
Against the hardships of the pioneer.

Through tears that told the pain of parting shone
The light of girlish eyes, and from her gaze
Faded Virginia hills, as in her mind
A vision of the far Kentucky rose.
And soon the perils of the journey came,
The Wilderness Road with all its hidden fears,
The bruit of savage Indians and at night
The iterant cry of wolf and wildcat, raised
As though to stem the Western flowing stream
Of active life, grown milder at the hearth
Of human kindness. Thus did she come
To live and learn and to each daily task
To bring her willing effort. Thus her face
Took on the look of patience, and her eyes

Turned serious, even as our fancy paints
The eyes of Mary when the angel came
To make annunciation. For mayhap
A prescience whispered to the guileless one:
“The day shall come when thou shalt bear a man
To carry high the torch of liberty.”
How evermore inscrutable is fate!
How evermore implacable the scales
That weigh life’s happenings! A timid bride
Came Nancy to the cabin of the man
Whom she had wedded, unafraid yet frail,—
Alas! too frail, to cope with those hard days
Which now became her lot.

For Tom had made
A hut of rough-hewn logs, with earth for floor,
Windowless, bare, and open to the blast.
And here he brought the wife whose daily toil,
Faithfully given, of recompense had naught
Save scanty food and clothing, and the leave
For brief respite in weary slumber. Here
Was born the little Sarah, all too soon
To droop and seek again the kindly earth,

Leaving the fragrant memory of her smile.
Then, in the discontent which often breeds
A hope of future betterment, these two,—
The shiftless pioneer and his fading wife,—
Moved onward to a little settlement;
Men named it Buffalo, on Nolan Creek,
Meandering through the blue Kentucky fields.
Close by the cabin bubbled one clear spring,
In cool seclusion, from beneath a rock
That kept it ever shadowed; so they named
The new place Rock Spring Farm.

And ere a year
Had seen the little family settled there,
A mystery seemed to brood upon the house;
And on a day God called a soul to life,
And Abraham Lincoln lived.

II

Haply the dawns
That press their wan cheeks on the uncumbered hills,
Nor fret upon the angled works of men,

Bring yet a finer essence to new day
And bathe the spirit in a rarer joy
Than those who dwell in towns have dreamed upon.
So loving Nature's compensations keep
Her scales at balance, and for us who seek
To see in retrospect those rugged days
In the gaunt wilderness, there is strange joy
To think upon the vigor and the life
Which from the first imbued that infant form,
And through the tender veins of him whose fate
Enwrap America, poured vital strength
To build at last the stature of a man.
Patient the mother was, as true the wife.
The first rude learning which to Thomas came
He gained from Nancy's hands. So, too, the child,
Turning from infancy at the mother's knee,
Was taught to read from the scant printed page,
And gathered lore of holy men of old,
Ever more thoughtful with the growing years.
Of schooling nothing worthy of the name,
Of preaching little, save when some lean man
Came hungry on his circuit through the wilds,

Pronouncing with thin lips the living word
And in grim mien and manner setting forth
The stern necessity of struggle here
Or misery hereafter. 'Twas as though
Fate hung a hopeless veil before the child,
Who evermore sought shelter in himself,
And as he learned to work, learned also well
To hoard the hours for study. Then there came
The move to Knob Creek, and again the change
To friendlier soil in far and fallow fields
Wrung by hard toil from Indiana's huge
And overshadowing forests. Gentryville
Became the new abode, forlorn and bare.
A cabin rough-hewn, into whose rude logs
Had bit the hatchet of that seven-year boy,
Laboring each day beside his father, reared
Its inhospitable unlovely shape,—
Haply a shelter but no whit a home;
And here each evening closed a day of toil.
Ah, who that dwells in curtained ease can know
The stress of those stern pioneers whose hands
Wrought out the miracle of a Nation's growth?

Who, fashioned in the large luxurious mold
Of this our day's prosperity, may dream
How Nature's face a century ago
Wore frowns where now she smiles?

Hard, hard the times,
And grim the struggle for existence waged
In those far settlements, those outer posts
Where Thomas Lincoln and his fading wife
Wrung a bare living from the grudging soil.
Meagre their fare and their utensils few,
Their raiment scarce above the garments made
By silent squaws in the red Indians' tents;
And if perchance the mother's patient hands
Wrought homespun clothing, 'twas for Sunday wear,
Above the daily uses of the farm.
So Abraham, the child of such hard days,
Grew into youthful stature, garnering strength.
At night he sought the fitful glare of logs
Burning upon the hearth to con the lore
Of Thomas Lincoln's Bible, or to find
In Bunyan's allegory food for dreams.
The *Life of Washington*, a precious part

Of the slim stock of books, was evermore
An inspiration and an upward call
To a soul bent on duty. Nor the least
Of these prized helps to gropings of the mind
Was that loved book of human tinctured rimes,
The poems of Robert Burns. So evermore
The earnest boy, after the hours of toil,
Fed his young mind and built his seeking soul;
And so the years sped till there came a night
When Nancy Lincoln reached the end of care,
And, folding her thin hands across her breast,
Whispered a blessing in her husband's ear,
Looked with a mother's lovelight in her eyes
On little Sarah and on Abraham,
And, with a sigh, passed out into the light.

III

How doubly solemn is death's whisper heard
Through the green aisles, the lonesome sacristies,
Of the primeval forest! Rude and plain
The burial of Nancy, with no word,

No sentence spoken, and no voice upraised
In solace or in song. And Abraham grieved
And brooded long on such a sore neglect,
Till, hearing that one David Elkin rode
To nearby settlements,—a man of God,
Itinerant preacher and exhorter he,—
He wrote beseeching that some service meet
Be rendered at his mother's humble grave;
And David traveled o'er the weary miles
On horseback to the cabin, and from far
About the country silent neighbors came,
And gathered at the grave, now grown with grass,
Beneath a stately sycamore; and there
A sermon preached, a hymn sung and a prayer
Hallowed the ground where Nancy Lincoln slept.

Less prompt the foot of toil to meet each day
The daily strife, when at the heart there tugs
The sorrow of a parting. Yet the task
Waits not upon the pleasure of the man,
And so the father and the son toiled on.
And little Sarah childishly essayed

A woman's labors. Abraham, between
The hours of heavy work upon the farm,
Sought how to add to their too scanty means,
Doing such service as he might, perchance
Splitting the rails for a far neighbor's fence
Or ferrying some traveler o'er the stream,
Content with what he got, the while he gave
A conscientious measure for his wage.
The quiet evenings were in study spent;
The boy, intent on education, strove
To garner fruitage from that arid soil,
And prospered so that soon the neighbors said
He had become the oracle of law.
At Jones's store the Solons of the place
Discussed the politics of State and town
And wrestled with the problems which their lives
Made very real and earnest. When the court
At Boonville held its session, Abraham came,
Listening with admiration to the pleas,—
Returning to his cabin then to dream,
Through the long silence of the sombre nights,
Of legal tilts and tourneys and the joy

Of swaying men by brilliancy of mind
And all the force of logic. But at home
There was scant comfort. Son and father felt
The need of all the thousand ministries
Of woman's hand. Neglected were the chores
Of the poor household, rusted and ill-kept
The homely vessels of the kitchen shelf,
Unmended the mean clothing. 'Twas perchance
Rather necessity than sentiment
Which spurred the elder Lincoln to make choice
Of Sarah Johnson as a second mate;
Yet was the choice most happy, for she proved
As noble as affectionate, as wise
As she was tender. And her stepson grew
All soon to love her from a heart as true
And crystalline as Nature.

When again
The struggling family in fair Illinois
Sought an amended fortune, she who brought
Her little store of household goods to fill
The ever pressing needments, carried too

The sunshine of her soul to that far home
To soften every hardship. Abraham now
Feeling the hour had struck that he should seek
To make his own place in a wider world,
Engaged with Denton Offutt to bring down
A flatboat to New Orleans, loaded deep
With such provision as should find a sale
In that great mart. 'Twas there his quick eyes found
The many avenues to giant trade;
'Twas there his nature turned in sudden shock
To see the flesh and blood of men bid off
Like chattels at an auction. With what mad
Grief and wild indignation did he cry:
"By God! if ever in the days to come
I have the chance to strike so vile a trade,
I shall strike hard!"

Ah, wondrous prophecy!
Sublime forecast of a sublime event,
To give our wisdom pause!

The country store
At primitive New Salem scarce could give
The inspiration for a destiny

So great as Lincoln dreamed. Yet mid the stress
Of that rude life he found the dreamer's hour
To fashion visions in his spacious mind.
Then came the Black Hawk war with quick alarm
To summon men to action, and he went
Undaunted by the meagreness of means,
A poor equipment of a frontier town.
With what strange interest does our thought revert
To that rough camp on the Rock River's banks,—
A camp which unto us of later days
Seems history's microcosm; for its lines
Enclosed, in comradeship of soldiers' lives,
Zachary Taylor, Robert Anderson,
Immortal Lincoln and—a name less blest—
Jefferson Davis; mounted rangers all,
And all as brave as hardy. When again
A respite came from Indian alarms,
The many-sided man put by his arms
And, as postmaster of his little town,
Gave honest labor for a meagre wage.

IV

Anne Rutledge! What a perfume seems to haunt
The syllables of that mellifluous name!
Imagination dwells upon her face,
And fancy wreathes her form in symmetry.
Slowly both face and form became a part
Of each day's dreaming of the earnest youth,
And Abraham Lincoln knew the deepest love
That ever in his heart made melody.
At night he glimpsed her eyes among the stars,
And in the twilights he repeated soft
The verses of a song which seemed to hold
The essence of her being. But too soon
Fate passed a subtle hand across her brows,
And she was fallen on sleep ere yet the joy
Of love had reached its ripening.

Lincoln knew

Alone his bitterness, nor made loud moan;
But those about him saw a shadow creep
In darker emphasis to mark new lines
And write its message on that virile face;

And ever after in the deep-set eyes
Dwelt the strange pathos of an untold pain,—
The mist of unshed tears.

To the small home
Had come the stealthy tread of Death to claim
The cherished form of Sarah, and once more
Father and son looked on a new-made grave
Beneath the whispering trees.

And Abraham wrought
With still redoubled vigor at his tasks,
Haply with hope to dull the edge of grief
Upon the unchanging round of daily toil.
Surveyor was he, boatman, rail-splitter,
Builder of rough-hewn cabins. In the woods
A wielder of the axe, and in the fields
A tiller of the soil. Yet all the while
He delved amid the precedents of law,
Studied the commentaries,—the debates;
Not seldom brought the logic of his wit
To bear upon the issues of some feud
Among his neighbors of that countryside,
Till people came to him for argument,

And afterwards for justice, and the folk,
Finding him ever jealous of the right,
And all unbending to mere policy,
Bowed to his will, and called him "Honest Abe,"
Nor questioned his decisions.

So the man
Became the politician in a sense
Worthy of all approval, and appealed
To fellow citizens for proof of faith
In his staunch loyalty; and at the polls
They showed their faith, and sent him to the halls
Of legislation at Vandalia.

So, in the early manhood of a life
Rooted in rugged nature, and upbuilt
Amid the strenuous ways and days of toil,
Came Abraham Lincoln to the open door
Of statesmanship. And we who, looking back
Down the perspective of the vanished years,
May mark the epochs of a great career,
Are conscious of an exultation born
Of knowledge that within that open door
Stood the sublimest fruitage of the time,
To adorn the annals of America.

V

Honor that oft doth seem too coy to list
The lofty wooing of a noble mind!
Fame whose blown hair and sun-illuminèd eyes
Not always bring their glory to the dreams
Of worthiest seekers; ye are hovering near,
To touch with eloquence a lagging pen
And fling new radiance o'er the historic page.
A new career hath opened to the man
Whose mind accepted destiny the while
His hand wrought out his own.

His steady eyes
Had fixt their questioning purpose on the words
Of prophecy and promise,—had indrawn
The spiritual essence of the sacred text,
And winnowed meanings, symbolisms, truth,
From the large utterance of inspirèd lips.
Within the ample storehouse of his mind
Were garnered phrases of an import rich
In comfort to the soul, and through his heart
The melody of love, vibrating, kept

Its unabated sway. From Avon's source
Of wit and wisdom flowed the exhaustless stream
Of wide humanity, touched by the hand
Of art inimitable, and upon its breast
Floated rich argosies, which the seeking mind
Of Lincoln seized and fed upon, and throve,
So grafting beauty on the stock of strength,
That perfect manhood should at last bloom forth,
Life's ultimate fruit and flower. His studious ways
Held him aloof from many a social scene,
Yet left him time for civic duties, deemed
The prime commands, laid on an honest soul.
From Blackstone, Kent, the elementary law
Was slowly made his portion. Physics soon
Became his study. Manly, gentle, true,
He grew to be the master of such speech
As made him Nature's orator. His style,
Concise and clear, simple, and more than all
Marked with the Anglo-Saxon nervous force
Which makes a sentence vital and a phrase
Undying.

Now there came a further call
To serve his State in legislative halls,
First at Vandalia, then in later days
At Springfield, whither the gaunt giant rode
On a poor borrowed horse, and owning naught
But saddle-bags, three law books and such clothes
As poverty might claim.

His good friend Speed
Was waiting, and to him the traveler came
Asking the cost of lodging, and, when told,
Turning in sad and melancholy plight,
Saying: "I have not wherewithal to pay,
But if you'll let me share your room, I'll make
My credit good by Christmas." So the two
Lived in the humble quarters, and the town,
From that time forward till the crowning year
Which summoned Lincoln to his high estate,
Became a patriot's home.

Now did the law
Absorb his every thought; the Federal courts
Drew to themselves the talent of the State,
Which, sparsely settled with a hardy race,

Yet furnished matter for continual feud
At bench and bar. The court-house, oft of logs
Though sometimes framed and boarded, bore small
trace

Of the robed majesty whence precedents
And legal cues were drawn. The judge was placed
Upon a platform of unsightly boards,
Raised to lend dignity where oft, alas!
No dignity abode; and at his side
The clerks, on comfortless unstable stools;
And on the benches, further down the room,
The patient jury. It were hard to tell
Why, in the rude and restless days which then
Filled out the passing year, the people found
So great attraction in the court-house, yet
It seemed the Mecca for all seeking minds
To journey to, and, having found, to keep.
Fitted to diverse needs, it held the place
Of lecture and of theatre, or the scenes
Of nightly revelry which Eastern taste
Turned to for respite from a world of work.
Riding the circuit had its hardships then,

Yet knew its compensations. Oft, perchance,
Adventure seasoned travel, and the men
Who rode together, making light the way
With joke and sally, fording swollen streams,
And sleeping in mean quarters, met in fierce
And wordy opposition at the court,
Intent to snatch, each for his client, all
That might be got by pleading, or the wit
To make a jury laugh.

Such men were they
Who, humble then, were giants when there came
The stress and strain of war. The names stand large
On history's page. Logan, the partner, friend
And counsellor of Lincoln. Douglas, he
Whose burning eloquence was yet to thrill
A Nation and touch wide the fount of tears,—
He whose supreme invective was to meet
The solid sense and humor of that man
Who conquered through simplicity. Bissell,
Stuart and Baker, Trumbull, Browning, all
Intent to carve out fortune, though the world
Stood with averted face. Now the campaign

Which carried the first Harrison to fame,—
“Log cabin” hero first, then President,—
Broke into wordy fury, and the Whigs
Knew no more valiant champion than he
Who spoke but by conviction, and so held
Respect of enemy as love of friend.
But not alone did politics enthrall
Or civic duty bind him. For there came
From Lexington to Springfield Mary Todd,
Young, witty, ever ardent and withal
Disposed to arrogance in claiming suit
Of many brilliant suitors, and to her
Lincoln made court; and soon the vixen Chance
Threw in the way of both the hot-blood youth
Of James Shields, who found grievance in a jest,—
A paper satire born of Mary’s pen,—
And made demand for satisfaction. So
Lincoln, whose chivalry was of the sort
Which acts nor mutes its presence, stepped before
Her anonymity, and bore the blame,
Accepting challenge, and, while loath to fight,
Refusing naught which honor might demand.

Then Shields was satisfied, and Mary felt
Her first light liking ripening into love
For one whose gaunt form held a knightly soul.
Then, as October glories turned to brown,
These two were plighted, nor postponed for long
The benediction that should make them one.
So, in the record of a great career,
Another leaf was turned,—a new bright page
Opened to meet the seeker's scrutiny,
And teach the lesson of a life.

VI

What time
The silver-tongued Demosthenes held Greece
Struck into admiration and dumb awe,
'Twas whispered that the gods had leaned to earth
To pour their miracle of words upon
The favored lips of men. And as the thrill
Of cadenced eloquence enthralled the souls
Of listening multitudes a deeper faith
Became the human dower.

So to our land,—
Dove-eyed America whose vizor rests
Above her brow serene,—came now a voice
To sway men to its will. Lincoln, inspired
By loftiness of theme or righteous cause,
Oft rose to heights sublime. Awkward at first,
Ungainly in his mien, nor having care
For outward accessories, when his soul
Rose in the majesty of spiritual power
To lift the banner of eternal right,
He seemed the avatar of Justice, crowned
With her undying bays. His attitude
Unconsciously took on a classic mold;
The lines of that lean figure fell apace
Into the forms of beauty. From his eyes,—
Those sentient pools wherein strange shadows lay,—
Flashed forth the lightnings of a noble wrath,
And flamed the indignation of a god.
Invective from his agile tongue poured out
A withering sarcasm, doubly barbed mayhap
By the scarce uttered jest. The anecdote,—
As coarse perchance as Nature's under side,

Yet like to Nature strong, unerring, true,—
Served as the vestibule to temples wrought
To ultimate perfection. To the jest
So flavored with the salt of Attic wit
That none could miss its purpose, oftentimes
Succeeded, in one vital moment, words
Fraught with the pathos of a woe concealed,—
Touched with the minor music of men's tears.
That tall shape, stooping as at first it rose,
That homely visage, as at first it turned
Full-featured on a half believing throng,
Became transfigured until they who gazed
Visioned a nimbus seeming to surround
The dark dishevelled hair.

Such was the man
Who now brought to his country's Congress all
A patriot's fervor. He had followed close
Upon the heels of Stephen Douglas, he
Who seemed designed of destiny to be
Rival of Lincoln with such rivalry
As brought undying fame to Illinois,
Which both claimed as a mother.

In the House,
As fellow members, Winthrop, Collamer,
John Quincy Adams, Andrew Johnson, he
Whom coming years brought to a doubtful fame,
And Alexander Stephens, whose worse fate
Foredoomed him to rebellion, sat and oft
Met Lincoln in debate. Here, too, were Toombs,
And fiery Rhett, and Cobb, who served his State
Forgetful of his country.

Douglas met,
As rivals in the Senate, Benton, Dix,
Keen Simon Cameron and Lewis Cass,
Grave Daniel Webster, master orator,
And Hale, and Crittenden, and John Calhoun,
And (name replete with memoried regret)
Jefferson Davis.

Through long strenuous years
Douglas, the leader of Democracy,
Had faced on many a field of hot debate
Lincoln, admitted chieftain of the Whigs;
And now the Nation's legislative halls
Echoed the rounded phrases of these two,—

One with a cultured eloquence o'erlaid
With classic lore and fine historic sense;
The other finding in deep human truth
And apt similitude the stronger force
To move the hearts of men.

Dark seemed the days
When war was forced upon a weaker State
At bidding of an oligarchy, proud
And arrogant withal. For slavery
Had cast its baleful shadow o'er the land,
And Mexico must at a nod be crushed
That the fell monster might be further gorged,
And serfdom mar the 'scutcheon of the free.
Lincoln the patriot yielded nothing up
Of principle. When once, at Ottawa,
Douglas had charged him with disloyalty,
He answered, with rare dignity and truth:
"I was an old Whig, and when in the House
My vote was sought in favor of the war,
I did refuse to affirm its righteousness;
But when my country was in arms, I gave
My vote for grants of men and money, ay,

For prosecution of the bitter strife
Even against a sister State. 'Twere well
To note the clear distinction which subsists
Between the wish to keep our country right,
And base betrayal of her in the wrong."
The war with Mexico brought issues up
Too soon to lead to conflict. That small cloud,
No larger than a man's hand, was to grow
Into a darkling tempest. Even now,
With Taylor president and party strife
Stilled only at the voice of sordid gain,
There came to ears not dulled by platitude
The low portentous rumblings.

To the man

Who more than others had placed power within
The hands of Taylor, now the offer came
Of Oregon's executive control;
But, with a wisdom haply not explained,
The offer was refused. 'Twas fated so.
And when, in after years, one said: "How good
Was the kind fortune that so guided you!"
Lincoln, with meditative mien, replied:

“Yes, you are right. Through all my varied life
I still have been a fatalist. What is
Must be, and Hamlet speaks the deeper truth:
‘There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will!’ ’Tis ever so.”
Then to the deeps of his far-searching eyes
There came the dreamy look which they knew well
Who best knew Lincoln, and a silence fell
That seemed a prophecy.

At Washington

The stress of politics grew keener ever,
And for domestic joys left scanty hours;
Two boys had blest the marriage, and were now
The brightest lights of home; for Robert kept
Much of his father’s likeness, and there dwelt
Upon the brow of Edward some fair trace
Of that which drew all eyes to Mary Todd,
When from Kentucky’s fields to Illinois
She brought her coronet of womanhood.

BOOK SECOND

BOOK SECOND

I

America, thou whose euphonious name
Is balsam to the ears of those whose love
Is basic and undying;
Thou whose broad fame
Is founded in eternal justice, thou
Upon whose brow the bays of peace are lying
With laurel intertwined,—to thee above
All other mistresses is due my vow
Of loyalty and love. What then must be
The sadness of the thought that thy young life
Was marred by discord? That an envious cloud,
Born of the lust of gain, should darken thee
And bring at last the fratricidal strife,—
The scarlet scourge of war? Thy pennons proud
Were doomed to droop, even in the freshening
breeze

Of thy fair morning tide, and ever through
Thy matin-song of liberty there went
The mournful minor tones of bondage. When
The settlers of Virginia, who knew
The curse of slavery, besought the King
To stop the infamy of trade in men,
He did refuse and back a message sent
Of stern rebuke. The fathers of the Nation—
The men who later in their hands did seize
Freedom's sweet fruit,—
Regarded bondage as a vanishing
And temporary evil. At the first
And general congress of the Colonies
Fair Philadelphia's legislative halls
Heard Jefferson proclaim
His bill of rights, holding a thing accurst
The law which calls
A man a chattel. Wide the proclamation
Spread through the land, and all men heard the bruit
Of abolition that should free the name
Of fair America from infamy.
Later the old Sun Tavern's storied walls

Saw the formation of the first
Society of Abolition, when
The men of light and leading in the Nation
Banded together in a common cause
To make half-bound America all free,
And tear from out the fundamental laws
That earliest, worst
And fatallest provision. Franklin then
Became protagonist of freedom's cause,
And Robert Morris, Patrick Henry, Rush,
Immortal Washington and Hamilton,
John Jay and Stiles of Yale,—
The men whose names had won
The veneration of their kind.
The righteous path which Pennsylvania trod
Was followed by New York and Maryland,
Then by Connecticut, Virginia;
Nor stayed New Jersey long without the pale,
All recognizing where the way of God
Departed from the King's way.
From the hand
Of the great-hearted, clear-eyed Jefferson,

There came the ordinance prohibiting
All slavery throughout the unbounded West;
'Twas not adopted; had it been, no State
Curst with an institution so unblest
 Could have been added to the sisterhood.
The patriot's impulse, as he stands to-day
With retrospective gaze, is first to sigh:
 "Alas! that they who held the scales of fate
 Should so have erred." The sober second
 thought
Brings forth the deeper wisdom, and we cry:
 "Necessity of law is ever fraught
 With issues which evade us. If we could
We would not now undo that past defeat,
 Since through such darkness only could fate bring
Our souls to nobler knowledge and make meet
 Our hearts for sacrifice." The canker sore
Fixt in our country's vitals could no more
 Be soothed with balsams into quietude,
 But only by the rude
And pitiless hand of unrelenting war
Be reft away forever. Yet the strife

Was in the misty distance, and the love
Of liberty was spreading. That vast field
From which were carved five future sovereign
States,
Was made secure to freedom. Far above
All mere expediency was set the star
Towards which the soul forever gravitates,
The beacon of all hope, loadstone of life,
To whose strong power we yield
As to a deity's bright avatar.
From schools that graced New England's granite
hills,
From Pennsylvania's Quaker righteousness,
From old Virginia's English rectitude,
Flowed forth the stream of liberty which made
The revolution real; the potent ills
Which followed pauselessly in slavery's train,
Debasing freemen as a contact lewd
Debases virtue,—these could never be
The vestibule of national content.
The truth was recognized, yet soon arose
The spectre of pecuniary gain;

The cotton gin an added impulse lent
To the production of the staple; this
 Demanded negro labor; from the slave
Wealth could be wrung,
And power from wealth, as flows
 A river from its source; no theories grave
Of abstract right born of the ethic sense,—
 No virtues sung
By poets whose high artistic recompense
 Was their sufficient guerdon, could outweigh
The call of selfishness; and so there grew
 An aristocracy of base intent
Built on a baser crime. Nor was the North
 Less guilty than the South. Though keen at
 first
To strike away the shackles, all too few
 Of those who championed freedom ventured forth
 Upon the sea of politics, to stay
The flood which swept the South.
 Men of the North were everywhere immersed
 In things commercial, enterprises vast,
Building of railways, opening of mines,

Great irrigation schemes to conquer drouth
And lines of telegraph to conquer space.
There was no time to fight for principle
While yet ungarnered wealth
Lay ready to the hand, and so there fell
A shadow of indifference which cast
Its pall upon the money-getting North;
Cotton was king in Northern factories
As in the Southern fields; a Nation's health
Might suffer so that mill and mine gave forth
Their golden harvestings to enterprise.
Then did the face
Of Justice darken with a frown, and lines
Of sorrow lie upon her regal brow.
A base alliance made between the greed
Of Northern money-kings and Southern lords
Of a sham aristocracy, arose
To hold the Nation in its grip of steel
And make the government a tool to feed
Rapacity and pride.
The Southern people, bred to politics,
Grew arrogant and proud, as those who feel

Superior power to organize and lead.
Thus out of circumstance did fate endow
The South with sure control. The weaker side
Became the stronger. History affords
No apter lesson. So the slave power grew
To be the dominant factor, till there came
The hand of destiny to clear anew
The Country's forehead of its brand of shame.

II

Ironical the fate that in a land
Sacred to freedom slavery should hold
High court within the capital; yet this
Insult was ours to bear.
From the free soil of Philadelphia
The Nation's seat, removed to Washington,
Became the citadel of bondage. Bold
And ever bolder did the serpent hiss
As shrank the Nation, fearing to make stand
Before its closing coils. From Georgia
By cession came the land

Out of which two great States
Should afterwards evolve. From friendly France
Louisiana, purchased, brought her weight
Of forty thousand slaves.

From Spain a territory doomed by fate
To human chains was bought, and Florida
Added her quota further to enhance
The power of Southern greed.

Then at the Nation's gates
Missouri knocked, insisting on the need
Of that base institution which depraves
The souls of those who wear
Its galling fetters. With far-searching eyes

Clay saw the opportunity to check
The monster's progress Northward, and so drew
The terms of the Missouri Compromise,
Giving the state to bondage, but forever
Prohibiting extension to the North.

Vainly did Douglas prophesy that never
Should the vexed question like a ghost arise
To plague the country. Yet more arrogant
Grew the sham aristocracy, whose power

Was based in that iniquity of law
Which gave the master right to cast a vote
Proportioned to the number of his slaves.
Law never knew
So strange a logic as the people saw
Writ in the Constitution. Southern cant
Was matched by Northern failure well to note
That slaves were either men or property;
If men, the franchise was their own by right;
If property, no owner had the dower
Of ballots based on wealth.
The people closed their eyes and shunned the light
Lest, when they came to see,
The cancer which consumed the Nation's health
Should grow into a conflict ending all.
Yet are the scales of God forever true;
No human judgments may His ends foretell;
But they whose vision was the keenest knew
The conflict now was irrepressible.
The grasping spirit overreached itself,
Making unrighteous war on Mexico;
And California, seized for love of pelf,

Became the seed of liberty. For lo!
A mighty call
Went up against slave labor in that land
Of golden promise, and though Wilmot failed
In his "Proviso," Freedom took her stand
For human liberty, and tyrants quailed
Before the imminent storm.
Now from ten States were delegations sent
To Philadelphia. Thither Garrison,
Phillips and Adams, Clay and Channing went,
And Whittier, he whose placid muse had won
The affection warm
Of all his countrymen. A pact was made
To free the country's 'scutcheon of its stain,
And to exterminate the abhorrent trade
In human flesh, which rendered worse than vain
Our boasted liberty.
Now party lines were drawn for deadlier strife,
Men saw the coming storm with quickened
breath,
While in the balance the Republic's life,
Shadowed beneath the brooding brows of death,
Hung tremblingly.

III

From out the turmoil and the deep unrest

A figure now emerges, and a mind

That like an Eastern storied palimpsest

Is brilliant in perception overlaid

With matchless eloquence,—a force refined

In the white fires of passion, unafraid,

Yet ever finding in diplomacy

The safest exit from the politic snares

That oft beset ambition. Such as he

Spring into leadership and unawares

Become their own dark Nemesis.

The Senate's leaders, Webster, Clay, Calhoun,

Had fallen into silence, and the walls

Which once had echoed their euphonious calls

To duty in the fields where honor is,

Heard nevermore the music, all too soon

Hushed in the quietude which often falls

Before the tempest bursts.

To them succeeded, in the early prime

Of manhood, Stephen Arnold Douglas, he

Who seemed the very flower of his time,—
The idol of the young Democracy.
And as the soldier thirsts
For glory, so did Douglas thirst for fame,
Finding in his misguided view, the way
In truculent complaisance with that same
Insatiate monster whose dark shadow lay
Already o'er the country like a pall.
So when came Kansas and Nebraska, seeking
Their territorial rights,
Douglas cast faith aside, and, boldly speaking
In favor of a crime, sought to wipe all
The laws that shielded liberty away.
'Twas then that the Missouri Compromise,—
A solemn obligation made between
The friends of freedom and of slavery,—
Was ended by repeal;
'Twas then the light
Went out in Liberty's high citadel,
And sad America's beseeching eyes
Gave up their dole of tears!
On such a day

Rose Seward in the Senate, valiantly
Proclaiming to the sense-enthralled throng:

“The struggle which we now so keenly feel
Is that which ever, through the aging years,
Exists uncrushed between the right and wrong.

You may as soon compel the heaving sea
To stay his waves, or bid the fecund earth

Quench her internal fires,
As bid the human mind forget its birth,—

The human heart cease craving liberty.”
Houston of Texas, too, refused to give

His vote to break a solemn act of faith,
And, pointing to the gilded eagle, cried:

“Yon symbol proud above your head remains

Shrouded in black, as it were now the wraith
Of murdered justice. Our departed sires,

Whose memories in our hearts forever live,
Must from the higher realms deplore the chains

We rivet on the free.

So faith is broken, honor crucified.”

All, all in vain! The barriers were cast down
That held the curse of slavery from domain

Over the North and West.

Each Southern town

Put on its gala dress. In Washington

The officers of government wore smiles;

Guns thundering from the capitol's green hill

Proclaimed in salvos over listening miles

The triumph of the slave power,—victory won

At cost of rectitude; the powers of ill

Wearing the victor's crown.

Blue Lodges, formed throughout the exultant South,

Sought to take quick possession, and extend

To the new territory slavery's sway;

While through the thoughtful North, from mouth
to mouth,

Was passed the word of warning, to defend

Free soil from this pollution. Day by day

The lines were closelier drawn. New England
formed

Emigrant Aid Societies, and soon

Came hardy settlers, taking up the land

For farming. While the foes of freedom
stormed,

Its friends grew more determined that the boon
Should not be lost; and so the fires were fanned
To ever threatening flame. A man arose,—
A man of conscience, yet with judgment bent
By personal wrongs,—to lead the freemen on,
John Brown of Ossawatomie; and those
Who felt his purpose right assistance lent
To aid its consummation. Robinson,
Pomeroy and Lane, and many an earnest soul,
Helped to build villages, make settlements,
Erect schoolhouses; while, with equal zeal,
The fiery slaveholders sought control
Of the wide land from which the law's defence
Had been withdrawn through cowardly repeal.
Such was the bitter struggle now at hand
For Kansas. On the side of slavery
Was all official influence;
The government of the United States
Was in the grasp of foemen to its weal.
From end to end of Liberty's own land
The friends of Liberty were made to feel
The bitter sense

Of base betrayal, and as honor hates
The stigma of surrender to a lie,
So in the conscience of the serious North
Sank ever deeper the compelling thought
That Liberty and Slavery henceforth
Could not dwell side by side,—could not be brought
Into the harmony for which those sigh
Who love their native land.

IV

Now came the breaking down of party lines;
Old issues disappeared, and on the new
And vital questions men divided stood;
Political allegiance, which confines
The individual action when the view
Is unobscured by stressful circumstance,
Was cast aside. The overbearing mood
Of the slave-holding South was bearing fruit;
The Democratic party which so long
Had been the citadel of bondage, now
Was rent in twain. Men of conviction strong

Against the right of property in slaves,
Broke from the ranks, and, as though following suit,
The old Whigs split, some seeking to endow
With privilege of franchise only those
Born of the native soil, while others held
To broader views, though still insistently
Demanding freedom for the man who craves
As for the man who claims it. So there came
A new alignment. Human liberty
Became the slogan of a mighty host
Who needed but a leader and a name,
And at the appointed moment there arose
In Illinois the leader and the name,—
Abraham Lincoln, the Republican,
Chosen of destiny to mold and weld
The elements diverse
Into the party that should come to be
The standard bearer in a new crusade,—
The force cohesive when the Nation's shame
Should culminate, and human passion fan
Hate's embers into war.
The time of compromise was past; the curse

Which strangled a free people could no longer
Be shut from sight, or be by falsehood made
A seeming blessing. Lincoln, hitherto
But little known beyond his State, came forth
As freedom's champion. From near and far
A sudden cry went thrilling through the land
That here was one whose sturdy faith was stronger
Than all the craven fears which made the North
Bend to the Southern lords;
No history affords
A lesson more astounding. Douglas came,
With futile argument to gloss his shame
In forcing the repeal
Of the Missouri Compromise. He brought
The apt allusion, the well-rounded phrase,
The eloquence and the persuasion bland
Which, in the Senate, oft had carried through
Measures the most unpromising.
In rapt attention Lincoln listened, then
Replied in utterance so deeply fraught
With feeling and in logic so complete,
That every auditor was made to feel

The inherent virtue of his cause.
The state-house, crowded to its outer doors,
Was still as death;
A burst of wild applause
Succeeded to the tension, while each breath
Was held awaiting
The final periods of a speech replete
With beauty which outran perfunctory praise,
And sense which forced conviction. Once
again,
When Douglas, at Peoria, sought to prove
The worse the better, Lincoln, like the flood
Which a pent torrent, liberated, pours
Upon the unstable reeds,
Tore from its roots the flimsy argument,
Till Douglas, crushed, essayed at last to move
His adversary to compassion. Thus
Did Lincoln leap to National renown.
Wise in the knowledge of his country's needs,
Great in devotion to her cause, he stood
A leader at the parting of the ways
Where friendship and life's holiest ties were rent,

And, 'neath the shadow of an incubus,
A smiling land drooped in the direful frown
Of those who plucked away her honored bays.

V

Fraud, slavery's best handmaid, now became
The means to rivet Kansas in her chains;
And at Lecompton, acting in the name
Of a free people, brought about a sham
And meagre constitution, fastening
The blight of slavery upon the State.
Then, in the righteous anger which disdains
All compromise, the hardy settlers held
Convention at Topeka, drafting there
An instrument of freedom, wrought to weld
Fair Kansas in the Union, North and West,
Of commonwealths forever dedicate
To liberty and law.
The people saw,
And seeing, welcomed the oncoming strife;
Impending battle hurtled in the air;

The crawling monster stood at last confest;
And when the legislature was dispersed
By force of arms,
At order of a recreant President,
All timorous alarms
Gave place to a determination, first
To conquer liberty, more dear than life,
Nor ever rest content
Till Kansas should be free.
Yet was the goal far distant. That great court
Which hitherto the world had deemed the
august
Tribunal of a sovereign people, fell
To be the instrument of party need,—
To bend to circumstance, and so abort
A Nation's welfare, that a section's creed
Should be writ in the fundamental law.
The calm historian, standing where the dust
And din of battle reach him not, can tell
With faltering tongue the story of a case
Become historic through the inherent flaw
Within its reasoning:

Dred Scott, the negro slave, the merest thing
Of sale and barter, now became
The pivot about which the questions turned
That should at last be wrought to settlement
On bloody fields of war. Type of his race,
He symbolized the shame
Of a great Nation's highest court, and earned
For Taney and his fellows that low place
Which, in the judgment of posterity,
Is silently assigned to those content
To sell their birthright for rewards all base
And sordid utterly.
Nor satisfied to rend with ruthless hand
The instrument which made the land half free,
This cruel decision, taking its false stand
Upon the right of local sovereignty,
In one breath said that each community
Should make its own decision to exclude
Or to admit the slave, and in the next
Proclaimed the right of him who held a slave
To take him, as his very property,
Into a State whose Constitution gave

That slave the right of human liberty.

Then, further to becloud the question vexed,
These sordid Solons, seeking to obtrude

Their unsought wisdom,—turning quite aside
From what the case involved, boldly declared
The law unconstitutional which fixt

A boundary to the realm of slavery.
So were self interest and false logic mixt
That people guaranteed untrammelled choice,
Found themselves fettered and without a voice

In the most vital issue. They were free
So long, and so long only, as they chose

To keep themselves ensnared
Within the meshes of the net which those
Who hated liberty had opened wide
To hold a land enslaved.

So was the issue of States' Rights,—that twin
Abortion born with slavery,—the spawn

Of greed and treason,—thrust unduly forth,
To force confusion while the people craved
Peace and the opportunity to win

From bounteous Nature her unstinted store

Of wealth diverse and splendid. Like the dawn
 Touching to life the sleeping fields, the North
Had seen the hope of a free country grow
Into a glorious promise. Now the light
 Seemed dying out forever. Nevermore
Should laughing rivers, all unfettered, flow
Into the boundless sea. In hope's despite
 The chains were being forged with stronger links,
And from the rostrums of a sneering world
Scorn mixt with pity o'er the sea was hurled
 At a Republic based upon a lie,—
 At Liberty with wrists in iron gyves,—
At a great Nation builded on the claim
 That all men were born free and equal, yet
 Outraging every holiest natural tie,
 And placing in unsparing hands the lives
Of fellow creatures,—ay, the right to maim
And whip to silence,—ay, the right to set
 Firm lip to lip, and, like the storied Sphinx,
 To answer nothing to a people's plea
And to a Nation's questioning!
 Alas! the deeper shame that, at the fount

Of government, should dwell the coward soul
That bends to arrogance. The Nation's force
Was ever wielded at the Southern nod,
And ever quick to bring
Confusion to the champions of free
Unfettered toil. The Congress did not count
The final cost of peace that gave control
To men whose theory had become their God,—
Whose conscience, seared and deadened to
remorse,
Now made the worse the better,—made sincere
Their faith in that base institution, born
In love of power and the human greed,
Which seeks the fruitage of another's toil.
Alas! that in the chair of Washington
Was seated now a weakling, in whom fear
Kept pace with indecision,—the mere foil
And tool of stronger men,—target of scorn
Of every patriot groaning to be freed
From the intolerable bondage of a class
Whose hands had seized the prize our fathers
won,—

Whose pride, alas!
Outran discretion, and whose final deed
Let loose the dogs of fratricidal war.

VI

With what nice jointure, what unmatched design,
Are wrought the works of Providence, to fill
Each one its destined purpose! To combine
All friends of human freedom, that the will
To banish slavery might find the way,—
This was the goal now set before the eyes
Of earnest thinking men. The force that lay
In Sumner's eloquence, in Seward's wise
And witty epigram, and in the keen
Philosophy of Phillips, Trumbull, Chase,
Gave strength to those who, faltering between
The love of peace and duty's call to face
A conflict irrepressible, now turned
For counsel to their leaders. Through the South
Determination hardened into hate;
Concessions, offered timidly, were spurned;

The administration, speaking by the mouth
Of a weak President, had learned too late
The lesson of a government's high call
To enforce authority. Even Douglas saw
The pride which ever goes before a fall
Rearing its head too brazenly. The law
Was being wrenched, and Congress bent the
knee
To dictatorial masters, who upheld
The standard of a Southern chivalry
Above the flag of freedom. 'Twas the hour
For presentation of the issues. Now
The people craved the truth, and Lincoln saw
Letters of fire writ large along the sky,—
Letters which spelled
A word to thrill each patriot heart, and dower
Each soul with courage. So when Douglas came
To hold Chicago in the magic net
Of his most specious logic, Lincoln met
And answered him minutely, showing how
The arguments were faulty,—where the flaw,
And where the reasoning oft reached a lame

And impotent conclusion. Then a cry
Went up for more discussion. Bloomington
Heard Douglas roll his splendid periods,
And Springfield listened rapt to words that won
The ringing plaudits of a thousand tongues.
And Lincoln, sitting silent 'mid the throng,
Was conscious of a spiritual voice which blent,
Divinely human, like an undertone
Beneath the soaring sound. No man among
The listeners could guess the passion pent
Within his bosom, like a tide that floods,
But cannot burst, its boundaries. Quite alone
He sat and pondered. Then, when evening came,
Within the capitol, upon the same
Platform which Douglas in the morning used,
He spoke, and on the listening multitude
There fell conviction and belief that fused
All feelings into one. For Lincoln's words
Were charged with faith which bears religion's
stamp,
And each position in his argument
Was reinforced, and in its fulness stood

Unanswerable. Truth, which ever girds
The man who, in a time of stress, is sent
By a kind Providence to bear the lamp
Of knowledge to a people all confused,
Wrapped in its folds this leader among men,
Who came to rescue Liberty abused,
And, with the eloquence of voice and pen,
To rend his country's chains.

Now followed joint discussion of the themes
Of vital moment; first at Ottawa,
Later at Freeport, Jonesborough; again
At Charleston, Galesburg, Quincy, Alton. Then
An intellectual battle, which remains
Unique in history's record, or the dreams
Of high ambition, was fought valiantly,
And from the fray
Victor and vanquished bore a fame away
All unforgotten of posterity.

How vivid is the picture fancy draws
Of this arena and the combat fought
Of these contestants, pleading each a cause
Dear to his heart,—each with a message fraught

With untold consequence, and both impelled
By knowledge that America stood still,
With forward bended head and breath withheld
The while the struggle wavered. Stern of will
And fixed of purpose, Douglas seemed to be
The embodiment of large ambitions. Brows
Broad and o'erarching like a canopy
Above his eloquent eyes,—a wealth of hair,
Dark in its purple deeps,—a mobile mouth,
Molded a lost cause fitly to espouse,
And on the battlements of blank Despair
To plant Hope's banner. From the amber
South
He drew the honeyed eloquence that held
His audience spellbound. From the sunburnt West
A wafture of the prairies' breath compelled
The senses to obedience. His deep chest
Swelled with emotion, as his words bore forth
The message of his brain. His short, stout
frame
Vibrated, and, as ever to the North
The inerrant needle turns, so ever came

The argument of Douglas, at the last,
To prove a theory which his mind held fast,
And justify a name
Dear to his friends: "The Little Giant."

Strange

The contrast which his adversary bore;
Tall, lean, loose-jointed; with a gaze whose
range

Seemed wide as life's horizon, those deep eyes
Gleamed with the lambent light,—the cryptic lore,—
Of long forgotten days. No sophistries

Were woven through the texture of his speech,
But over every argument was flung

The unsullied garment of simplicity
Which still reveals the truth.

The gift to reach

The common conscience on his eloquent tongue
Lay ever ready, while felicity
In illustration drove his lessons home.

Such were the giants wrestling for a prize
Beyond the computation of a mind

Yoked to material aims. The compromise
Which one suggested, and in terms defined,
Was by the other deemed the weak device
To soothe the cancerous growth which soon must come
Even to the country's vitals. In such mood
Did Lincoln, moved to seeming prophecy,
Quiver upon the platform where he stood,
And with the passion of conviction cry:
"Sometimes I see the end of slavery;
I feel the time is coming when the sun
Shall shine no more, nor from the darkened sky
Shall any rain fall, on a single one
Of all God's creatures going forth each day
To unrequited toil."
How deep the inspiration who shall say?
Son of our native soil!
Was his alone the vision,—his the way
To reach the appointed goal?
We may not know but in all gratitude
Be thankful that, within that temple rude,
Dwelt Lincoln's crystal soul.

BOOK THIRD

BOOK THIRD

I

How oft upon a breathless summer noon
Falls the faint whisper of a coming storm,
And, as the sun turns to the waiting West
Where white cloud banks thrust up their shoulders high
Into the glow of gold, a strange, long hush
Follows the bustle of the breezes, still
And ominous as fate, as though God held
His breath a little, ere he uttered forth
A word of high command.

'Twas even so
That everywhere, from those stone-bounded farms
Still echoing to the guns of Bunker Hill,
Even to the warm bayous, the thirsty sands
Where Mississippi ends a long career,
A silent menace in the oppressive air
Seemed dolorously to hush the lips of men.

Then, as the cleavage of opinion grew
Ever defined more sharply, there was heard
Another word in whispers iterant,
More widely spoke than Slavery, such a word
As brought strange joy to tyrant ears, and filled
The souls of freedom's lovers with dismay,
A word of fear,—Secession.

Was it then

In vain the fathers had made sacrifice
To weld the colonies, that into one
The many should be merged? That patriot blood,
Poured out at Concord and at Lexington,
To purchase liberty, had made more dear
Our sacred Western soil?

Alas! the call

Of judgment, as of conscience, falls unheard
Upon the ears of passion. Through the South
The lightning of disunion rent its way;
The cry went up of rule or ruin; they
Who long had gripped the Nation like a vise,
Would take no counsel of adversity,
But, dreaming of an empire builded high

Upon the fruitage of unrighteous toil,—
Puffed with false notions of a finer skill
In politics and statecraft, these hot sons
Of a long-suffering mother sought to strike
That patient mother down. With what deep sense
Of anguish did the loyal North take heed
Of hastening events! More sharply drew
The lines of party. Now the eyes of men
Turned, seeking leaders; and as slowly grows
Out of the mist a vision, so there loomed
The figure of a man upon the plains,—
Tall, gaunt, untutored of the schools, yet touched
With such a grace of Nature, such large mind,
As might befit a later Moses, sent
To lead a later people to their goal.
Across the borders of wide Illinois
Floated a name adown the Western breeze.
Across Ohio, Pennsylvania, came,
In uncouth syllables, like an uttered faith
Half understood, reverberating calls,
Repeating as though mystic meaning lay
Amid its folds, the name of Lincoln. Soon

A whisper grew to volume of a cry;
The teeming East, till now but half aroused,—
Grown gross and all intent in garnering
The golden harvest of its thrift,—held out
Appealing hands towards that vast prairie land
Whose sunburnt face wore youth's bright smile.

There came
The call for a deliverance,—for a man,—
For one strong soul around whose constancy
Might group opposing forces. To that call
Answer was given; Abraham Lincoln came,
And stood before the people of New York,
Who went in curiosity to see
This Western prodigy, this man of jokes,
Stump speaker against Douglas; he best known
For much coarse humor, and a pretty wit
At repartee and sally. It was there
That Bryant sat presiding. Greeley, too,
Half hearted at the first, yet growing grave,
As, one by one, the records of the past
Were from the storehouse of that pregnant brain
Brought forth to light the present.

They who went
To scoff, remained to pray. This Western boor,
Rising to dignity, and swept along
By the heroic urgency of his theme,
Soon held his audience spellbound.

He based all
On that great charter of our liberties
Which, holding all men free and equal, stood
Our bulwark for the future. It were vain
To speak of compromise while treason sank
Its poisoned fangs and hissed its hideous name,—
Vain to placate a people who had sought
Excuse to rend the Nation, and pluck out
From our bright flag its stars.

“Let us have faith,”
He cried outstretching a prophetic hand,
“Let us have faith that right makes might, and so
Dare to do all our duty to the end,
As we shall understand it.”

Struck to awe,
The people of that cultured audience heard
The solemn words of scholarly and rare

Wisdom pronounced by lips whose utterance
Seemed guided by compelling power and touched
With a celestial fire. A mighty change
Was wrought within the hour. A single speech
Swept Lincoln into leadership throughout
The limits of a country now at last
Awakened to its peril. Wide his fame
Was carried through the North, the East, the West,
And from a thousand thousand throats burst forth
A cry of exultation that the hour
Which brought the crisis also brought the man.
The Party which in Illinois had raised
The unblemished standard of free statehood, soon
Spread mightily throughout the land, and he
Became the chosen leader of its vast
And ever growing ranks.

And all the while
Secession sentiment took deeper hold
Throughout the turbulent South. On Breckinridge
Fell the poor mantle of an erring cause,
While Douglas, claiming faithfully to hold
The scales of moderation as between

The advocates of sectional designs,
Raised high the banner of his name, and fought
A valiant battle for ambition's goal.
Lincoln, supremely conscious of the weight
Of grave responsibility which soon
Must bear upon the Country's President,
Shrank from a nomination to that high
And care-encumbered office; but the call,
Now grown imperious, could no more be spurned,
And so, with this fair crown of his desire
Haply within his reach, he took the cross
Which patriots proffered, and became the brave
Unflinching standard-bearer of a Cause.

II

Now destiny, that leans to no man's lure,
Leads onward to the crucial test of strength,
While a vast Nation, pausing in its task
And daily occupation, shows the world
A spectacle more grand than pageantry
And all the pomps of war. From morn till eve

The fateful ballots fall; from morn till eve
A mighty people waits with quickened breath
The issue of a peaceful struggle fraught
With war's grim possibilities. At last
The end is reached. The country solemnly
On Abraham Lincoln lays the accolade
Of its supreme command. And he, bowed down
With weighty sense of that great burden, lifts
Eyes sanctified by tears towards Heaven, whose smile
Seems shadowed by the clouds of Earth's despair.
Yet now a gleam of hope o'er Northern skies
Breaks to the glory of a sunburst. Through
The nerves of patriot freemen thrills the fine
Vibration of a coming action, filled
With promise of deliverance, and at last
Assertion of a manhood long betrayed,
The breaking of the bonds of shameful fear.
Nor at the North alone is the result
With satisfaction hailed. The Southern men
Who once made slavery their sole excuse
For a long-lost allegiance, now come forth
In colors honester, and wide proclaim

Their final goal disunion. They rejoice
That the election of a free-soil man,—
Choice of an “abolition President,”—
Should furnish specious reason for the step
Long dreamed of and desired.

And so begins
The stress and struggle of a contest meant
To pluck at last a righteous victory,
In hate’s despite, and so to bind thy brows,
O Land of our affection, with new bays.

Ah, proud fond mother, rended of thy sons;
Ah, bleeding mother, whose mute wounds betray
More eloquently than all spoken words
Thine offspring’s black ingratitude! What tongue
Shall fashion thought to utterance, or bear
To hearkening ages knowledge of the wrongs
Which mark thy base betrayal?

In the halls
Reared for thy uses, stalks Conspiracy,
And damnèd Treason slinks along those aisles
Once trodden of patriot feet. Thine arches now

Resound with blatant threats, where once was heard
The echoed eloquence of Henry Clay,
Or Webster's organ tones. Buchanan sits,
Palsied and puerile, in the seat made great
By Washington and Jefferson, and all
The sources of thy power are sapped away
By traitors under cover of the dark.
Within the Cabinet are men intent
To compass thy undoing,—to disarm,
And so make impotent thy battlements,
And rive thee of thy strength. The ship of State
Must be dismantled ere its flag be struck
At bidding of the foe. A Memminger
Boasts openly that, with a pliant tool
Within the White House, all is easy now
To crush the Federal government, and make
All Lincoln's efforts futile. From the vaults
Of a depleted treasury are drawn,
And used improvidently, funds whose care
Devolved on Howell Cobb. From each free State
And from the Northern arsenals are sent
Arms and munitions to the rebel South,

That so the nerves of war may be at hand
To strike the power that made them. Floyd, alert
To serve Secession, bears a brazen brow
Beneath his crown of shame, and scatters wide
The soldiers of the country to far posts
And distant reservations; while the ships,
Making at best a feeble navy, go,
At order of a Toucy, well beyond
The reach of sudden call.

And all the while
Each traitor, boasting of his "honor," draws,
With promptitude punctilious, his pay;
Each arch conspirator goes up and down
Demanding mileage, salary and all
The perquisites which a too generous land
Gives to a ruthless horde.

Ah, strange indeed
The spectacle of government in hands
Intent to overthrow it! Davis, Cobb,
Toombs and their co-conspirators, each day
In conclave plot high treason, and each day
Draw sustenance from that fond mother's breast

Against whose heart their poniards, ready drawn,
Long to strike home. A nice diplomacy
Marks every step of the recusant States.
One after other, legislatures pass
Secession ordinances. One by one
The Southern Representatives withdraw,
Leaving the trail of treason in their wake.
Thus while events are crowding fast, and faith
Half falters even in Northern hearts, the stern
Imperious call to duty thrills the soul
Of that unmatchable American,
Who, standing on the dark brink of a chasm,
Pales not, but bends his shoulders to the task
Which graves its deepening lines across his brow.

III

Anderson of old Kentucky,—
Born and bred in old Kentucky,—
Prated little of his “honor,”
Cared as little for his life.
He was of the stuff of heroes,

(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
With a soldier's intuition
That surrender of position
At beginning of the strife
Scarce could be considered plucky,
Though expectant Southern Neros
Dreamed of fiddling, while sedition
Through a wounded land was rife;—
Deemed this man exceeding lucky,
(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
That he had a rare occasion
To be loyal to the South;
Loyal to a section merely,
Though betraying by evasion
What all true men love most dearly,—
God and country! Treason's mouth
To the man of old Kentucky,
(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
Whispered words beneath its breath.
Then the War Department sent him
Where, in Moultrie, rebels pent him,
While around the soldier plucky,

(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
Cannon threatened death.

Floyd, who prated much of "honor,"
Thought it no disgrace to strip
Arsenals of war munitions,
Armories of arms,—to slip
Through the War Department's portal
Stores to Southern States, to be
Ready for the new conditions
Of the war which slavery
Had at last made certain, mortal,
Too, perchance, for one or both
Of the stern contestants, waiting
For the signal, haply loath
First to strike, and ever hating
Thought of bloodshed in the land.
And Floyd, thinking he was certain
Of a willing quick compliance
By the man of old Kentucky,
(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
Sent him, in the firm reliance

That when time should lift the curtain
On the drama of the war,
He would yield the fort's possession
To the forces of Secession,—
Yield, nor strive to stand
Firm against the South's defiance
And the cannon's roar.

Three score men and five in Moultrie,—
In outworn, decrepit Moultrie,—
Spent the Christmas making merry
Though the time was full of dole.
Came an order on the morrow
From the man of old Kentucky,
(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
Silently supplies to ferry,—
Silently, as though in sorrow,
Men and arms in boats to carry
Off to Sumter, when the sun
Should be setting. Every soul
Then embarking from Fort Moultrie,—
Outworn and decrepit Moultrie,—

Passed the guard-boats in the harbor,
Passed the gates, nor sought to tarry
Till the destined goal was won.

Then when Charleston, on the morrow,
Woke to find the fort deserted,—
Realized the plan concerted,—
There was anger far and near;
And as over Sumter floated
Free the flag of starry beauty,
Five and sixty men devoted
Raised a long and lusty cheer
For the man of old Kentucky,
(Anderson of old Kentucky,)
He who knew a soldier's duty,
Never knowing fear.

IV

How sad the closing in of night, the slow
Departure of the faint glow of the sun
Which once had lit Hope's day!

From patriot hearts,
Both North and South, belief that some fair way
Would yet be found for peace, died sorrowfully,
And in the place of soothing and of scorn,—
From the great North concession,—from the South
Insistence upon mastership,—there grew
Determination, on the one hand, now
To save the Union, though salvation meant
War's ravages and ruin; on the other,
To fight for statehood and perpetual right
To slavery and secession. Boastfully
The cry went forth: "They will not dare attempt
Coercion of the South," while through the North
Rang out bold words, wherein the wish, perhaps,
Was father to the thought: "They will not dare
To fire upon the flag." And we, who stand
To-day upon the parapet of time,
Through history's perspective see that both
Boast and belief were idle. For behind
Each stern assertion lay the stalwart will
Of manhood that was all American,
Though for the moment severed. It were well

To ask where, in this mental crisis, stood
The man about whose personality
All history seemed to turn. The primal call
For ultimate justice, equity exact,
Was Lincoln's high incentive. To his soul
The thought of human bondage was replete
With all that is abhorrent. To his mind
A free Republic built on Slavery
Was a political monstrosity
Self-doomed to sure destruction. Yet he saw
With Southern eyes a Southern problem. Here
The Institution had fixed firm its roots
In a too pliant soil. No abstract plea
Could justify a stealage, or make right
The confiscation of the property
Of citizens protected by the law.
He deprecated with his utmost force
The thought of setting free the slaves without
Just compensation to the owners, ay,
Payment in fullest measure. Let the loss
Thus incidental to a righteous act
Be borne by all the Nation, not alone

By those whom circumstance had caught within
The meshes of its net. To buy the slaves,
To free them, to give back the precious gift
Of individual liberty vouchsafed
To every being by the Almighty,—this
Was Lincoln's lofty dream. He recognized
The difference in the races; that the black,
Inferior in development, could not,
And should not, ever occupy the plane,
Of the Caucasian. He renounced with ire
Social equality of white and black,—
Renounced it as abhorrent to the sense,
And fatal to the good, of both. His plea
Was but for liberty, the human right
To universal manhood, and the dower
Of nature to her children. From the hour
When first he saw a slave upon the block
Being bartered as a chattel, his great soul
Turned sick with loathing, and his whole career
Was molded by the love of freedom. Now,
When the impending crisis loomed above
The bent heads of a mighty people, dark

And ominous as fate, the vision changed,
And the immediate necessity
Pressed on him, till upon his heart was writ,
As *Calais* upon Mary's, one sole phrase—
To save the Union. Question of the slave
Must for the time be put aside, to wait
The working out of evolution's law.
'Twas Lincoln's task to save, at any cost,
The fabric builded by our fathers' hands,—
Cemented in the blood of patriot sires.
Such was his aspiration, and, with faith
Firm fixt in God's omnipotence, he bent
His shoulders to the wheel, while 'round him grouped
The loyal manhood of America.
And feeling, still divided, seemed to grow
Daily more constant in his constancy.

Now, in convention at Montgomery,
A form of government was made to clothe
Rebellion in the garments of the law;
And Davis, whose ability was seared
By such vindictiveness as rarely mars

An intellect like his, was chosen chief
Of a great people greatly borne away
Upon the tide of passion. Solidly
The people were Secessionists. Not so
In Texas, where the love of country held
Its sway in many hearts. 'Twas needful there
To cozen fraud and turn to treachery,
Buying the doubtful voters, and at last
Forging the ballots which forced Texas out
And tore her from her moorings. One more shame,
One more humiliation, to bow down
The head of scorned America! Her forts,
Her arsenals and ammunition, all
Were at the bidding of a mob self styled
A Sovereign State, surrendered tamely, while
The lone star flag rose in the air above
The banner of the Nation; and the troops,
Lacking a leader with a soldier's heart,
Marched heartless and unsoldierly away.

V

Plots dark and counterplots. No man might know
Where the assassins lurked intent to strike
The standard-bearer down. The boast was heard
That he whose great commission bore the seal
Of an untrammelled people should not live
To execute their will. And as the time
Drew near for Lincoln to assume the robes
Of his high office, deep anxiety
Oppressed all loyal hearts.

Almost by stealth
The coming President was hurried through
The towns and cities which should most have vied
To do him honor. And when, on the eve
Of his inauguration, Lincoln stood
Among Americans within the gates
Of the American Capital, he felt
A sense intuitive of threatening clouds
Which lowered like a pall. Then came the day
That ushered in an epoch big with fate.
About the East front of the capitol

The functionaries of a government
Upon the brink of ruin gathered where
Successive Presidents had solemnly
Taken the oath of office. In the throng
Stood Seward, he whose statesmanship o'ertopped
The crafty efforts of his adversaries;
And Chase, with such a presence as proclaimed
The noble mind intent on noble aims.
Firm and erect, the venerable Scott
Watched with a soldier's eye the pageantry,
The while, above his white and shaggy brows,
The anxious lines seemed deepening one by one.
For guileful treason had nigh reft his hands
Of every shard of military strength,
And now, when from the Nation's capitol
A prayer was offered to the Nation's God,—
When the mild sceptre of democracy
Passed from a weakling's coward hand to meet
The firm grasp of a man,—there were but few
Trained soldiers to be mustered for a need,
A handful gathered by the vigilant Scott,—
Militia, regulars,—a scanty band

To do a mighty duty. On the stand
Was Taney, whose soiled ermine ill became
The administrator of a solemn oath.
The scholar Sumner and the student Wade
Were near Buchanan, with his courtly mien
And all uncourtly spirit; while in front
Stood the persuasive Douglas, tactfully
Reaching his hand to hold the hat of one
Erstwhile his adversary, and in doing so
Imparting to a menial act the grace
And dignity of knighthood. From the crowd
Gleamed eyes whose light of hate was ill concealed
By an assumed indifference. No man knew
Whose soul was loyal or whose heart was hot
With treason's smouldering fire. The air was charged
With coming tempest; and that strange unrest,
Half manifest in inarticulate sound,—
The voiceless bruit and menace of a crowd,—
Hung as the sultry breath of summer hangs
Before the lightnings of a rended sky.
Facing the winds of gusty March, were men
Long trained at foreign courts, the diplomats

Whose sophistry was soon to meet the sense
Of one whose soul was riveted to truth,
Nor knew evasion. Here were patriots, too,
Waiting the word of him who came to lead
A people out of bondage; and here, too,
Were rebels panting to unloose the leash
Which held the dogs of war.

And, towering high
In that rude majesty which ever wraps
The prophet like a mantle, Lincoln stood,
And with uplifted hand and humble heart
Made oath before the throne of God, and took
Upon his valiant soul a people's woes.
Where in the storied pages of the past
Is writ the record of a mightier scene?
And where among the uttered words of men
Is found the pathos of a plea so deep
As fell from those lips, trembling with the touch
Of patriot zeal and yearning?

“Ah!” he cried

“My fellow countrymen, men of this soil,
Take heed lest passion lure you to despair.

This country with its institutions, all
The blessings that our Heavenly Father showers,
Is yours, the heritage of you who live
Amid its hills and vales. Oh, let there be
No bloodshed to make horrible the green
Of its inviolate fields. With all the strength
Within my being, I beseech you pause,
Ere on the altar of our common land
You lay destroying fingers. North and South,
We all are one; we cannot separate.
Take time to think; there can be nothing lost
By that delay which but insures the right.
It has been said that peace and property
Throughout the South are menaced by the turn
That brings a new Executive; 'tis false!
I say, as often I have said before,
There is no purpose,—no intent, direct
Or indirect,—to interfere with that
Peculiar Institution of the South,
Within the States where now it does exist.
I have no lawful right to interfere,
Nor, if I had the right, have I the will.

Out of my heart I ask for your belief,
You who are still dissatisfied. With you
Must rest the issue of momentous war;
The government will not assail you, nay,
Will strain all patience to the utmost test
Ere plunging into conflict. Pray you mark,
You have no oath recorded in high heaven
To break up and destroy the government,
But I have registered before my God
An oath to still maintain it. We are friends;
We cannot, must not, be estranged. The ties
Which bind us are unbroken. Mystic chords
Of memory, stretching forth from patriot graves
And far-off battlefields to living hearts
And hearthstones over all this teeming land,
Will yet the chorus of the Union swell,
When touched again, as surely they will be,
By better angels of our nature."

So

Lincoln the martyr closed, his frame convulsed,
His high, ungainly shoulders bended down,
Like Atlas bearing an ungrateful world.

Above his forehead leonine massed hair
Hung as the aureole of a god in pain;
And from the fountains of those earnest eyes
Welled up the guerdon of unbidden tears.
Then, for the answer to his high appeal,
A ribald sneer ran through the listening throng;
A thousand throats sent forth a jeer, that told
The hate of treason grown most insolent.
And Lincoln's mouth turned sadder for a smile
More pitiful than weeping, and he held
Outward his toil-worn hands. And from the crowd
Came back the answer,—ribaldry and jeers.

BOOK FOURTH

BOOK FOURTH

I

“Within an hour we open fire.” The words
Were Beauregard’s last message to the man
Shut like a solitary sentry left
To hold a gate forlorn. The answer came,
Prompt, firm, decisive; fearlessly as though
The grizzled soldier, whose scant garrison
Made a defense but mockery, held power
To countervail attack: “We will not yield.”
And even while the sun with later ray
Kissed the upswelling folds of that dear flag
Whose stars wrote liberty against the sky,
The hour sped by, and over Charleston’s bay
There roared the summons to a million sons
To strike for God and country, roared the doom
Of blatant treason arrogant and blind;
And as the echo of the first gun died,

Hope fled with mobled head, and Fate cried out
The sentence of a desolated South,
And all the woes of ruin.

“They have dared
To fire upon the flag!” So through the North
Leaped the wild words that made a people one,—
Rang out the clarion call to loyal hearts
To put aside all controversies, fears;
To spurn the dalliance with a honeyed peace,
And set stern faces to oncoming war.
And even as the sturdy Anderson
Endured the pounding of the rebel shells,—
Even as, one by one, his magazines
Rent with expiring crashes the soiled sky,
Through every hamlet of an outraged land
Thrilled the determination, now at last,
To strangle treason, and with pitiless hand
To crush the hissing serpent which had grown
To vile maturity.

Now with strong thews
The newly wakened giant bends to lift
The burden on his shoulders. Nerves of steel

Quiver along a Nation's rounded limbs,
And thrill with agony so near delight
That pain is lost in ecstasy.

“The flag!

The flag is fallen at Sumter! Now by God!
These men, who were our brothers, are our foes.
These faithless children of our mother's womb,—
These beings who preached honor while they stole,
And whined of loyalty even as their hands
Were steeped in treachery, and through the dark
Groped to strike dastard blows,—these are henceforth
The common enemy.”

From Maine, whose front
Faces the silent sunrise, to the sands
That welcome evening in the Golden Gate,
Such words and such avowal sweep abroad
To render action vital. And amid
The seething and commotion, one great soul
Remains serene, though bent with sadness down;
Continues self contained, though bowed before
The coming desolation and the woe.
Lincoln, whose anguished heart felt every pang

Inflicted on his bleeding country, fears
Nor falters not at all. His call goes forth
For men, for means, for loyal hearts to serve.
And from the hills and valleys of the land
Comes such response as only they may know
Who, in the crisis of a Nation's life,
Have marked a Nation's power. Ere the call
Has echoed backward from New England hills,
The streets of Boston throb beneath the tread
Of Butler and his regiments. New York
Springs to her arms. From Pennsylvania, quick
To save the capital, the first troops pour
Into defenceless Washington. And where
Ohio spreads her sunlit fields, upspring
Insistent thousands, begging for the right
To serve their country. An upswelling cheer
Greets the first bugle call. For every man
That Lincoln calls for, ten demand the chance
To serve beneath the colors so disgraced
And flouted at Fort Sumter.

Up and down,
Through cool-aisled forests and lone country roads,

O'er meadows green in the April sun,
Amid the roar of bustling city streets
And clack of mill and factory, floats the lilt
And loyal melody of such a song
As patriot hearts conceive and bring to life:

“We are coming, Father Abraham,
Six hundred thousand strong.”

What though Kentucky fall to insolence,
And Tennessee refuse her helping hand?
What though Missouri seek to turn her back
On that which her best citizens revere?
'Twere easier to bear these shafts than see
The sad decadence of Virginia,
Mother of old time chivalry. And thou
Fair Maryland, how hope and fear by turns
Usurp our thoughts of thee!

Were it well done
When, through the sullen streets of Baltimore,
The men of Massachusetts marched to reach
The country's capital, that thy false sons

Should play assassin, and all cowardly
Seek to shoot down the patriot soldiers sent
To do a patriot's duty? Ah, no, no!
Yet thou art saved at last, my Maryland,
And still remain'st an unextinguished star.
The South, whose hand hath cut the golden thread
Which bound our hearts in love, no more holds place
Within Hope's citadel. Alas! the line,
Once but imaginary, now hath grown
To be a yawning chasm. The Nation's ships
Blockade the Southern ports; the Nation's troops
Pour to the Southern border. From the staffs,
Even at the gates of Washington, there flies
The flaunting symbol of black treason, bold
To rear a head defiant. 'Twas reserved
For one brave man's strong hand to tear it down,
And so, at Alexandria, to yield up
A brave man's life.

'Twas thus that Ellsworth came
To win the splendor of a patriot's grave,
And garner fame immortal, garnering death.

II

Galloping, galloping over the Southland,
Horses as eager as riders for battle,
Guns jarring heavy on lumbering caissons,
Chains tugging hard at the rings of the traces;
Up and down, up and down through all the Southland,
Men pouring into the filling battalions,
Companies forming and coming together,
Tallied off quickly, compacted to regiments;
Thousands on thousands of men from the cotton fields,
Led into line by the broad-hatted planters,—
Planters long-haired and unkempt, but with glittering
Eyes, that shed forth the red glow of the smouldering
Fires in their bosoms!

From old Virginia
Comes the loud call to erect a new nation,—
Comes proclamation that Richmond is chosen
Capital city of slavery's stronghold,—
City whose halls shall henceforward be dedicate
Unto the uses of such a confederacy,
Made up of sovereign States, as men of Southern blood
Long have dreamed fondly of.

And ere the first demand
Made on the elder lands, crosses the ocean,
Friends of America,—friends in prosperity,—
Turning to foes at the strife's earliest echo,
Make preparation for prompt recognition;
Hasten to stultify former professions
Of faith in the human endowment of liberty,
Hatred of slavery, blot on America's
Blazoned escutcheon; hasten, almost ere asked,
Willingly aid to grant, granting belligerent
Rights to a section rebellious and passion-mad.
France, the first friend of the struggling colonies;
England, twice foe yet professèd well-wisher,
Both alike reach to rebellion the weapons
To aid in the Nation's destruction.

All Europe stands,
Looking askance at the tortured Republic;
Secretly hoping that, falling asunder,
All that made mighty the rule of a people
Worshiping freedom, should perish forever!
Thus is the theory of bondage exalted
Most by the lips that had feigned to deplore it;

And o'er the face of Atlantic's wide waters
Float, in the tones of scarce-veiled exultation,
Words which are bitter as aloes: "Democracy
Is but a poor rope of sand!"

And so galloping,
Horses as eager as riders for battle,
Rushes to conflict a valiant people,
Spurred by encouragement, cheered on by aliens,
Blind to the fact that the envy of Tyranny
Ever seeks Liberty's fall.

III

Johnston, Beauregard and Longstreet,
Heading columns clad in gray;
Jackson, Kirby Smith and Early,
Ewell, Elzey, Jones and Bee;
Pushing onward their battalions
In bewildering array,
While the scouts of Holmes and Evans,
Creeping back from tree to tree,
Tell how Federal troops are coming
With the coming of the day.

Concentrating on the turnpike
Leading off to Centreville,
Forming and again deploying
Where the Stone Bridge, grim and gray,
Sees the left flank of the Southrons
Waiting in the dawn, as still
As the forms of sculptured sentries,
For the coming of the fray.

Through the air of early morning
Comes the long and sullen roar
Of a single rifled field-piece;
And the Federal skirmish line,
Pressing forward, gives scant warning
Of the battery soon to pour
On the ranks of Cocke and Bonham
Rain of iron and steel. A fine
Cloud of dust along the turnpike
O'er the bridge at Sudley Ford,
Tells the route the loyal column
Moves upon to cross Bull Run,—
Tells the story of the coming

Of the guns whose muzzles poured
Challenge of Rhode Island's Second,
While in fury, gun for gun,
Splintering sound breaks through the woodland.
Burnside's brave untried brigade
Sweeps to front, then grows unsteady,
Falling back on the reserves;
Sykes's regulars, already
Bracing each thin rank that swerves
Through the bushes of Bull Run.

Heintzleman's division, sweeping
Onward, bears the starry flag,
Where the dogged Evans struggles
To maintain his faltering line;
While across the ford come creeping
Sherman's men, till on the hill
Two brigades, in line of battle,
Move, as by a single will,
Past the Henry house, and keeping
To the stream's high bank, entwine
In a stern embrace and deadly

The disordered troops of Bee,
Who o'er fence and furrow leaping,
In wild panic break and flee.

Onward come the blue battalions;
Backward fall the men in gray;
From the guns of Ricketts, Griffin,
Roars a voice which seems to say:
"All the Nation watch is keeping
On the issue of to-day."

Now as rearward seethes and surges
All the mass of fear-struck men,
Beauregard with Southern colors
Strives to rally shattered lines;

And Bee, turning as he urges
Courage on his soldiers, cries:
"Look at the brigade of Jackson;
Like a stone wall there it stands!"
Prophecy is oft a mystery,
And a chance word thus defines
One whose name through future history
Like a lifted beacon shines.

Once again the loyal legions
Press the column as it flies;
Once again a rain of iron
Hurtles from the batteries.

The brigades of Franklin, Willcox,
Charge across the broad plateau;
Stern the face of brave McDowell,
Watching fortune come and go.
Palmer's cavalry, in splendid
Rank on rank, now turn and wheel,
While the blue and gray seem blended
In the flash and crash of steel.

In the hot and hazy waning
Of the Summer afternoon,
Comes the desperate final struggle.
Fry calls Burnside to his aid;
Howard every nerve is straining,
While the long Confederate line,
Reinforced from Johnston's army,
Presses on the Federal guns.
Now the rallied ranks are gaining;

Now a wave of panic runs,
As the battery of Ricketts
Falls to silence, and too soon
Griffin, reft of every gunner,
Must perforce remain supine.

And ere sinks the sun to slumber,
Gray-clad soldiers hold the field,
Where the dead the hillocks cumber,
And war's horror stands revealed.

IV

Disaster and the crushing of fond hopes,—
The turning sick at heart,—the ghost of fear
Reaching its tenuous fingers, and despair,
Not yet triumphant, but with velvet tread
Nearing men's consciousness,—such forces filled
The loyal atmosphere with many a dark
And half-defined foreboding.

From Bull Run

There seemed to come the wail of Liberty,
Struck down, all undefended of her sons.

The Union troops had fought with dogged strength,
Yet, in the issue joined as if to test
The skill and valor of the North and South,
Arrayed alas! in hostile ranks, the day
Was won by Southern dash, and such a zeal
As bore the symbol of a riven land
Up to the mouth of loyal guns, and spent
Most noble blood in most ignoble cause.
The blue-clad columns, dazed, were falling back
On Washington. The wires were thrilling news
To every hamlet of a waiting land
That boded direful happenings, and fell
Upon the Nation's hearing like a dirge.
Was it indeed the truth that Southern men
Possessed the fighting blood? That Northerners,
Coarsened of commerce, could no more uphold
The unsullied banner of a knightly name?
A mighty people, humbled, answered No!
Like waters rushing o'er a smiling plain
When some faint flaw has broadened to a breach
And left them unconfined, so leaped to war
Unnumbered thousands, eager to retrieve,—

Determined to avenge. No longer now
Were regiments refused. The flood swept on.
Fort Hatteras surrendered and full soon
The flag of Union fluttered from its staff.
McClellan, whose auspicious star burned bright,
Took from the willing hands of that untamed
But age-encumbered lion, Winfield Scott,
Command of troops about the Capital.
September came, and with it came the tread
Of stealthy treason luring Maryland;
But ere the dark design could ripen, fell
The mailed hand, preventing by arrest
Assemblage of the legislators, so
Saving a State from threatened suicide.
Then came Ball's Bluff, a fight for field and fame;
And gallant Baker, pierced by volleys, gave
His true heart's blood to dye with richer hue
The glorious stripes upon his country's flag.
Port Royal yielded to the loyal will,
And, with new energy, redoubled faith,
The giant of the North shook free his locks,
Girding anew his limbs for victory.

Yet Europe, ominous upon her thrones,
Was evermore unfriendly. 'Twas in vain
The Great Republic looked for moral aid
From those who once professed a holy zeal
To set the bondmen free. Commercial needs
Outweighed the ethic call. The sordid mills
Of Birmingham and Manchester set up
The wail of mammon for the daily gorge
Of raw material to feed the looms
That made of Cotton king. And fired anew
By hope enkindled through a foreign hint
Of intervention, the Confederate States
Strove to ingratiate, to plead, to fawn,
That flattery, the handmaiden of Trade,
Might make revolt triumphant.

So abroad

The South despatched her emissaries, men
Skilled in the use of diplomatic phrase,—
Eager to grant the utmost favor asked,—
Endowed with power to bind in solemn pact
And smooth all dubious issues. On the *Trent*
Sailed from Havana Mason and Slidell,

Bent on accomplishment of such a work
At two proud courts, St. James and gay St. Cloud.
And close upon the *Trent's* heels steamed in haste
The *San Jacinto*, under the command
Of Wilkes the patriot Commodore. Unused
To idle parleys when quick action meant
The triumph of the right, he stopped the *Trent*,
Took prisoner the Southerners, and steamed
Back to his country, where the men, interned
Within Fort Warren's walls, might silently
Reflect on life's mutations. Then there rose
A cheer through all the North. The people felt
Deep irritation at the quick desire
Of England and of France to recognize
The rebels as belligerents, and now,
When England made imperious demand
That men seized on her ship should be released,
The irritation grew to passion deep,
And bitterest resentment. Wilkes's deed
Won the applause of all. The Congress passed
A vote of thanks; the Navy's head extolled,
And all the people praised him. Through the land

The cry went up of "No concession!" Wide
Outspread the wave of popular demand
For war before surrender.

But one soul
Remained serene; one well poised intellect
Rose above passion as a mighty rock
Rises above the sea. 'Twas Lincoln's hand
Which stayed the fatal step; 'twas Lincoln's keen
Unerring sense of right that lifted up
The banner of consistency, and so
Saved a distracted country from a leap
Into disaster fraught with dire result.
The South within its heart of heart rejoiced
At such a turn of fate as should bring aid
And firm alliance with a nation strong
And on the sea predominant. To this
The frenzied North was blind. But Lincoln saw,
And in the homely phrase of common sense
Said: "One war at a time. Did we not fight
Great Britain once for doing this same thing
Which our own Wilkes has done? These prisoners
Must be surrendered." And his voice was heard
By ears distraught with passion.

Thus again
The wisdom of the patriot held on high
The scroll whose legend was his country's weal.

V

How often hath the historic muse set down
Words of profoundest import, which perchance
The living hearers lightly dwelt upon,
Lacking the knowledge born of later years!
Lincoln the patriot, hating as he might
The wrong of human chains, yet clearly saw
And balanced all the equities. For him
The prior duty was the primal call
To save his country from disruption. Naught
That could be said of moral issues, wrapt
In the eternal question: "Bond or Free?"
Could move that massive intellect or swerve
That ever guiding hand.

"Our object now
Is the firm maintenance of the Union. All
Questions of slavery must bide their time,—
Be settled in the light that Heaven shall shed
When our first duty's done." So rang his words,

And so his facile pen, confirming, wrote:
"I seek to save the Union,—that alone,—
Neither to keep nor to destroy the slave.
If I could save the Union now without
The freeing of one slave, that would I do;
If I could save the Union by the act
Of freeing every slave, that would I do;
If I could save the Union only by
Freeing some slaves and leaving others bound,
I would do that, and deem the action right.
I shall do only that which helps the cause
Whose life is part of mine."

So from the fount
Of a great spirit flowed the limpid stream
Of patriotism, unalloyed with self.
Statesman, not yet emancipator, he
Nurtured within his heart of heart the twin
Flowers of right and liberty. By such
Deep wisdom, rising ever o'er the stress
Of party passion and the moment's heat,
States that yet wavered in the balance found
At last their place within the Nation's home.

So was Kentucky held, and Maryland;
And so Missouri, in despite of all
The schemes of the destroyers,—held in place
Within the Union arch. And from these three
Came forty thousand soldiers, clad in blue,
To fight beneath the stars.

And still to give
A touch of the heroic, Stanton came,—
He of the iron will and stalwart breed,—
Acrid, irascible, haply too quick
To pluck the nettle of offence amid
The flowers of good will, yet ever true
In steadfastness of purpose to the aims
Which were his high ideal. Ofttimes his mood
Tried sorely the great President, who yet
Knew well the pure gold 'neath the glittering steel
Of the War Secretary,—knew and bore,
In that long patience which a parent gives
To a too petulant child,—bore silently,
Or with a suasion gentle as the breeze
Which bends a thorn bush on a day in June.
And Stanton, holding stoutly to his own,

Grew first to listen, softening his wish
To meet that other will, and finally
Learned to accept the wisdom which, through all
The darkness of the time, shone beacon-bright
From Lincoln's towering mind.

Now from afar,
Like to the faint notes of a bugle, borne
Across the listening air, there floats a note
Of Freedom's coming song. The law was made
Prohibiting forever in the then
Existing Territories, slavery.
And so the second step to tear the roots
Of bondage from the soil of liberty
Was taken, while the lurid welkin rang
With all the strident dissonance of war.

VI

Down the road to Shiloh church,
On a morn of early Spring,
'Neath the trees where robins perch
Sudden bullets sing.

Up the road from Shiloh church,
 Sherman's men, unfaltering,
Through the mud and marshes lurch,—
 Into action swing.

Unsuspecting in his camp,
 Prentiss, with his tired brigade,
Lies at rest beneath the damp
 Canvas colonnade.
Comes the myriad-footed tramp,—
 Comes the gleam of rebel blade,—
While the tethered horses stamp,
 Startled and afraid.

Tumbling out, the sleepy men
 Into line of battle form;
Onward press the foe, and then
 Breaks the fiery storm.
Crushed before that flood of men,
 In their motley uniform,
Federals, numbering one to ten,
 Bow beneath the storm.

Soon, the foe on both his flanks,—
Guns to left and guns to right,—
Prentiss sees his shattered ranks
Breaking into flight.
All are captured, and the banks
Of Lick Creek are covered quite
With the decimated ranks
Telling of the fight.

Pittsburg Landing, where the lines
Of the Federal troops begin,
Wakes to life as daylight shines
Through the battle's din.
Grant, with steady voice, assigns,
As the regiments rush in,
Troops to stay retreating lines,
Hoping yet to win.

Near the log house on the bluff,
Looking o'er the Tennessee,—
Twenty pieces scarce enough,—
Frowns artillery.

Hurlbut, he of patriot stuff,
 With compacted infantry,
Stands to meet the summons gruff
 Of the enemy.

Next McClernand, Sherman, come,
 Their divisions steadying,
While, with measured beat of drum,
 Wallace strives to bring
Order to his cumbersome
 Mass of stragglers, rallying
Round the colors, stricken dumb
 While the bullets sing.

Thus as sinks the saddened sun
 Far across the Tennessee,
Half the bloody work is done,
 Half is yet to be.
Grant growls: "I've only just begun;
 Though driven back, not whipped are we;
The fight to-morrow shall be won;
 We'll have a victory!"

Sunday closes. With the dark
Lew Wallace with five thousand men,
Comes and glows the dying spark
Of a hope again.
Monday dawns; and ere the lark
Trills his welcome, marsh and fen
See the opposing lines that mark
Stern resolves as when

In the bright and buried past
Greeks in burnished corselets, high
Held aloft their shields, and cast
Headlong, valiantly,
Life and honor to the last
On the field where, silently,
Waging battle, furious, fast,
Warriors fight and die.

Now the splendid corps of Buell
Of the army forms the left,
And with Johnston's right a duel
Fights till nearly cleft;

And, disheartened by the cruel
Death of Johnston, the bereft
Southern legions fall as fuel
Burned in warp and weft.

On the right the battle rages
Through the long and bloody day;
Crittenden the foe engages,
Naught his hand can stay.
Brave McCook, through all the stages
Of the turbulent affray
Writes his name on history's pages,
Glorious for aye!

So was Shiloh lost and won,
On those early April days,
Where the river's waters run
Neath the Western haze.

VII

Spring blooms to Summer and the Summer wanes,
And as the hectic glow of coming death
Touches to strange new beauty whispering leaves,
Nature seems hearkening to a message filled
With mystic spiritual meanings.

So it was

That they who watched the heavy hand of Time
Pass a rude palm across the patient face
Of him who bore his country's burden, saw
The presage of a season wherein peace
Should come at last to dwell eternally.
The lines that marked those hollow cheeks were graved
In deeper emphasis, and o'er the brow
The shadow of a sadness grew divine
In growing deeper human. The high stoop
Of weary shoulders bent a little more;
And such a light illumed those deep gray eyes
As spoke of thoughts no man might know.

Perhaps

The memoried figure of Anne Rutledge passed,

In visioned loveliness, across his dreams,
And scenes of old romance, like quaint conceits,
May oft have mingled with the strenuous, stern
And unrelenting problems of the war.
So, in the darkest summer of his life,
Did Lincoln hand in hand with Nature go,
The while the carnage ceased not.

Then there came
September, big with fate and stained more red
Than autumn's gorgeous touch might emulate;
For o'er the page of history fell a name,—
Antietam,—and the hearts of men stood still.
Turn thy face, Mercy! Let thy pitying eyes
No more behold the sodden fields of blood.
Take cognizance no more of riven limbs,
And wounds which from dumb mouths seem yet to cry
Against the hell of conflict!

From beyond
Potomac's marshy banks Lee's legions came,
While Hooker crossed Antietam, out of range,
Then turning, swept into the field and formed
His lines for battle, Ricketts on the left.

Meade with his Pennsylvanians strongly held
The centre, while the guns of Doubleday
Opened upon a rebel battery
Which sought to enfilade the loyal line.
Then darkness swept, like a swart mantle, down,
And all the thousands of opposing men
Slept on their arms till dawn.

At daylight came
The rush to action. Just beyond a wood,
Across a plowed field that in Hooker's front
Lay brown beneath the early Autumn sun,
A battery pushed its devastating way
To a sere cornfield, which, before the day
Should sink to slumber, was foredoomed to be
Soaked with America's best blood. Here Meade
Was side by side with Ricketts, facing there
The thin brigade of Lawton and the men
Of Jackson's own division. Hooker's corps
Hurled itself headlong on the rebel host
Till Hood's division, coming up, brought hope
To those who faltered.

Then the fresh brigades
Of Gordon, Crawford, both of Mansfield's corps,
Came to support the wavering Union line,
And mid the crash of guns and rending scream
Of shells which hurtled death along the air,
The carnage held its sway, and brave men lay
In awful heaps amid the serried corn.
So wore the mad day to its bloody close,
The while through streets of Sharpsburg rumbling went
The carts and wagons improvised to do
The ambulance's duty, laden each
With its soul-sickening burden of dead flesh.
Such was Antietam,—such the hideous tale
Which, written in the page of history, makes
And mars a scene of that wide drama whose
Unfolding is the story of a world.

BOOK FIFTH

BOOK FIFTH

I

How deeply rooted in the human breast,
How firmly seated in the human soul,
Is that large aspiration, unrepressed
By any law, defying the control
Of all tradition, love of freedom, whole
Untrammelled and unchecked, which through the race
Courses like life blood, levying its toll
Of discontent divine, and o'er the face
Of men the symbols of its presence quick to trace.

Sweet Liberty, what realms of joy are thine!
What music marks the fall of riven chains!
What light celestial o'er thy brow doth shine,
Thou goddess of our country's hills and plains!
Woe ever to the tyrant who disdains
The lofty word thy lips articulate,
And woe yet deeper to a land where reigns
Enthronèd slavery, the fitting mate
Of sin-conceived Rebellion and unreasoning Hate.

Long in the brooding bosom of the slave
The seed of liberty had dormant lain;
Long in a land of promise yearning gave
An added sharpness to the dole of pain.
Across the flag the sanguinary stain
Of legal bondage bowed a Nation's head;
Till those who loved America were fain
To harbor hope, commingled oft with dread,
That soon the curse should be forever banishèd.

Yet ever with an ordered motion flow
The under currents of life's restless sea;
The mind that made the law alone doth know
How long fulfilment of the law's decree
Shall wait on circumstance. But destiny
Is thwarted never, and there comes at last
The end that crowns the work, that law may be
Supreme to-day as in the storied past,—
Fixt as the hours when Fate her silent die hath cast.

Through mists of all the years since Lincoln saw
His fellow beings bartered at the block,
Had gleamed the light of God's eternal law,
Impregnable and moveless as a rock
That rears its head, nor ever reckes the shock
Of weltering waves, whose crested summits tower
In hissing foam which serves to make a mock
Of its own nothingness. Now came the hour
To strike, for he who had the will had now the power.

Not hastily, but after labored thought,
The great American saw clear the way,
Stern logic of events at last had brought
The line of duty to the light of day.
No longer need that earnest spirit pray
For guidance, since a word of high command
Bade him go boldly on, nor longer stay
The deed awaiting his obedient hand,
That dowered with liberty a long defrauded land.

Thus in conjunction came the hour and man
To strike from millions fetters which should be
The future symbols of a tyrant's plan
To thwart the uplift of humanity.
Thus came the sword of righteousness to free
Each base slave from a baser owner's will,
Cleaving tradition that the world might see
How outraged Liberty is potent still
Her mission and her purpose ever to fulfill.

So Abraham Lincoln wrote his glorious name
Beneath the proclamation which endowed
The slaves with freedom and himself with fame
More lasting than a Cæsar's, and more proud.
Above the fleeting plaudits of the crowd
The story of this deed, through all the years,
Shall echo in reverberations loud
And fill the measured music of the spheres,
Touching with joy the memory of human tears.

II

At Falmouth, where the Rappahannock runs
Serenely smiling to the winter sky,
The gallant Sumner massed his men and sought
To cross to Fredericksburg, now occupied
By Barksdale's Mississippi riflemen,
Who, from behind the shelter of the walls
Of buildings and of gardens, filled the air
With the staccato of his sharpshooters,
The while Lee's engineers upon the heights
Reared hasty breastworks, seeking to repel
The loyal gunboats steaming up the stream
Near to Port Royal. Further up, the bluffs
Leaned nearer where the river narrowed. Thence
The guns of Burnside pounded on the town,—
The stubborn town that hugged its treason close,—
Till Fredericksburg was rid of Barksdale's gray
And dust-begrimed sharpshooters, and the streets
Echoed the tread of loyal feet once more.
Upon the left was Franklin, pushing on
To lay pontoons, o'er which the army passed,
Filling the long hours of the sombre night
With the low muffled sound of myriad feet,

Hasting to form in line of battle where
The looming shapes of Lee's Confederate ranks,
Full eighty thousand strong, in silence stood
Awaiting the assault. There on the right
The corps of Stonewall Jackson, firm, compact,
Was fashioned for defense, while on the left
Was Longstreet, heading long, thin lines of gray,
As moveless as the shrubbery whose leaves
Seemed listening for the call to bloody deeds.
Now through the mist a sudden burst of sun
Glinted upon the Union troops, whom Couch
Led from the battered buildings of the town
To capture Marye's Hill.

No braver men
Did ever smile on death than these who rushed
Even to the base of that rude wall of stone,
Behind whose shelter rebel batteries, masked,
Belched forth the red hell of their cannonades.
Alas! the heroic men of Hancock's corps
Went down like grass before the reaper's blade;
Alas! for those brave Irish hearts that beat
Within the breasts of Meagher's bold brigade,
Dashing itself again, and yet again,

Against the heights impregnable, until
The thousands that had charged lay on the field
With hearts that beat no more.

Then Hancock's corps
Charged up the flashing heights, and French's men
Rushed madly on the death which Barksdale dealt
Unsparing from the safety of his wall.
Howard's division, in support, and part
Of the strong corps of Wilcox, held the rear,
To keep communication with the town.
And even as the day drew near its close
The slaughter of brave men went madly on,
And only night brought silence.

Such the price
Which freemen pay for liberty! Such, too,
The hideous toll of war when treason lifts
A blood-stained hand to take a Nation's life
In sateless rage. And such was Fredericksburg.

III

Through the dark winter Victory held her scales
At even balance, and, as dawned the Spring,

Each side was fain to flatter hope, nor yield
To the deep craving for surcease of all
The agonies of war. At Washington
The Congress of the Nation, grown to know
The depth of that great soul whose utter faith
Made doubt impossible, in stern resolve
Bended new energies, and cast aside
All minor differences in the work
Which yet remained to do. But still there lurked,
Like poison adders hissing in the grass,
Through all the straining North, the "Copperheads,"
Intent to strike their coward blows where'er
Shelter from harm made treason tenable.
How wide the contrast with their brethren quick
To meet the issue and face death like men
Upon the Southern fields! Lee, moved to draw
His sword by a misguided sense, yet true
In every action of his manly life;
Johnston and Longstreet, Stonewall Jackson, brave
Unflinching soldiers fighting for a cause
Made less ignoble by their valor,—these
Stand forth as men, demanding from our minds
The lofty judgment of a high ideal.

But they who, at the North, by word and deed,
Sought ever to embarrass and destroy
The government whose sustenance they sucked,—
These serpents risking naught, but from the dark
Spitting their venom in the hope to kill,—
Deserve from human judgment only scorn,—
The averted face of every honest man!
Nor was there unanimity to seal
And make efficient efforts of the North
To enforce the Union's supremacy.
Among the generals jealousy too oft
Uttered insidious whispers.

More intent
To win the unearned plaudits of the crowd
By claiming credit for another's act,
Than to coöperate to bring about
Results of greatest import, some of those
Whose post of power should have instilled the thought
Of high endeavor showed the petty wish
For self aggrandizement.

And Lincoln's heart
Was heavy at the thought of victory lost
Because of aid withheld. Nor did the time

Bring cheer to the great, loyal people held
In a prolonged suspense. The Spring grew fair,
And pipings of the birds made Nature glad,
Despite the dirge of murder in the air;
May-day was mild, when westward on the road
From Chancellorsville the regulars of Sykes
Marched cautiously, soon coming on a force
Of rebel troops, who, in extended line,
Strove to outflank them. Seeking to connect
With Slocum's corps and failing, Sykes fell back,
And when night came the men in blue and gray
Alike were conscious that the dawning day
Must bring the groaning harvest of red death
To many a valiant soldier.

With the light
Came Sickles' corps from Fredericksburg, and soon
Birney's division, pounding with its guns,
Scattered confusion through Confederate ranks;
Then charging, in its onslaught carried down
All opposition, capturing at last
A half a thousand prisoners. The day
Wore on with varying fortune. Afternoon

Found Birney formed in hollow square, his guns
Placed in the centre. Barlow's tried brigade
Supporting well his right; but Whipple's Third,
Relied on to support the left, came not;
And while the Union leaders waited, keen
To push success to victory, there rushed
A horde of panic-stricken fugitives
From the Eleventh Corps, in Birney's rear;
And these bore tidings of disaster wrought
Upon the First division,—Deven's men,—
Caught unaware, and in an avalanche
Of Stonewall Jackson's army swept away
In awful wreck and havoc. Suddenly
From out the thick woods poured the men in gray,
Charging from three sides, sweeping to their doom
Down the old road from Chancellorsville, in rout,
Schurz's division,—rolling from their path
Von Steinwehr's men, and spreading through the ranks
Of all the Federal troops the panic bred
By threat of a disaster unexplained.
Sickles, with cavalry of Pleasanton
Preparing for a charge, was quickly brought

To sense of his own danger, when he learned
That Howard's corps was crushed, and in his rear
The rebels were triumphant. There was one,
One only thing to do; and Pleasanton,
Turning to Major Keenan of the staunch
Eighth Pennsylvania, gave his command:
"A charge is needed. Take your regiment
Into those woods, and hold the enemy
At any cost till I can get my guns
Into position."

Keenan said: "I will."

And, with his scant five hundred men, he charged
Into the thirty thousand troops in gray,
Checking them for a moment, till he fell,
Dying a glorious death with duty done.
Meanwhile the artillery of Pleasanton
Made ready in the road to greet with shot
The oncoming enemy, who from the woods
Displayed the loyal flag, in hope to cheat
The Union troops, upon whose frowning guns
They waited but to charge. The subterfuge
Availed but little, and at last they came

On, on, as burst to flame the gaping mouths
Of cannon belching death, and piling high
The roadway with the dead. And in that hell
Fell Stonewall Jackson, wounded mortally,
The bravest soldier in a cause forlorn.

IV

Few could see as Lincoln saw
Clear the working of the law
That America must be
Welded close in unity.
Not two peoples, one alone
Could insure to Freedom's throne
Permanence and power to draw
Men to action. Such the law.
In the East was Richmond, still
Subject to a rebel will;
In the West stood Vicksburg, frowning
O'er the Mississippi, crowning
With its black defiant guns
Bluffs at whose green bases runs

That onswEEPing, mighty stream
On whose breast the flatboats gleam,
Bearing fruits of industry
Southward to the shining sea.
Now throughout the waiting land
Comes a summons and command,
Comes a patriot message sent
By a patriot President:
“We must have, as have we shall,
Richmond, treason’s capital;
But so long as in the West
Rebel strength is unrepressed,—
While an alien power holds sway
O’er our inland waterway,—
We can never be as one,
Moving on in unison.”
Wise the words, and happily
Time was ripe for wisdom; he
Who from out the West had brought
To his task the single thought
To uphold his country’s cause
And enforce her righteous laws,—

Grant, the silent, came to press
Sternly onward to success.
His the keen and careful plan
When the boats of Porter ran,
Past the flashing batteries,
Lighting up the sombre skies,
Past the forts of Vicksburg, on
To the mounds of Warrenton.
Then the transports, silently
As a tide which seeks the sea,
Under cover of the night,
Floated, ere the morning light,
Safe below the city, where
Grant awaited them. With care
Every move was made. Each day,
Through the sunny month of May,
Saw the lines more closely drawn,—
Saw the coming of the dawn
Which should usher in the day
Of the rescued Union's sway.
One by one the strongholds fell,
Though the rebels fought full well.

Soon, above the state-house dome
In the town of Jackson,—home
Of a recreant State, the flag
Of the Nation floated. Brag
As they might of dare and dash,
Southern soldiers, mid the crash
And the ceaseless roar of guns,
Where the Yazoo swiftly runs,
Fled across the farms wherethrough
Grant's converging lines of blue
Pressed, and ever closelier drew,
Round the goal of long desire,—
Vicksburg, city rimmed with fire.
Shut in the beleaguered place,
Pemberton, brought face to face
With starvation, grim and gaunt,
Long withstood the siege of Grant;
Holding out, from day to day,
While the gunboats kept their play
Ceaselessly of shot and shell
On the crumbling citadel.
Less and less the rations grew,

While the Southern standard flew
Through the lengthening days of June,
Hoping for relief, yet soon
Forced to ask for terms. So fell
Treason's Western citadel,
Carrying downward in its fall
Rebellion's dearest hopes, while all
The loyal North sent up a cry
Of triumph and of victory;
And lips devout found time to pray
Upon the Nation's natal day.

V

At Frederick lay the armies of the blue;
At Hagerstown the gray. The intrepid Lee,
As one who quenched at last a burning thirst
To quaff from Northern beakers, gave command
To enter Pennsylvania's wide domain.
And now, at Chambersburg, his solid ranks
Stood, waiting till his strong hand should unleash
Their eager spirits for the coming fray

Which all felt hovering, like an imminent storm,
Athwart the silent sky.

Then came the word
To concentrate at Gettysburg. To Meade,
Gallant and wise yet ever cautious, fell
Supreme command of the great army, now
Destined at last to conquer and retrieve
Long wasted days of sickening delay
And unexplained inaction. North and South,
A sense intuitive, pervasive, strong,
Filled every breast with knowledge that the hour
Had struck for the decisive final test,
Upon whose issue hung the mighty fate,
Of a divided people. And as rose
The reddened sun upon July's first day,
The corps of Reynolds, marching through the town,
Came unexpectedly upon the foe,
Before whose heavy force he fell back, till
The enemy, grown rash, advanced too far
And quickly learned his error. But alas!
The gallant leader, pressing to the front,—
The patriot Reynolds,—garnered to himself
The meed of noble death.

Then Howard reached
The field of action and assumed command,
Leaving his corps in charge of Schurz.

High up
On Cemetery Hill, the men in blue
Looked out upon the ranks of Ewell,—they
Whom Stonewall Jackson had so often led
To victory for the wrong. Once and again
Repulsed, the gray line faltered and drew back;
But at the last the rebels held the town;
And as the sun declined across the hills,
Each army sought in concentration, strength
To meet the morrow's issue.

To the right
Of Cemetery Hill, the Federals lay,
In wide extension towards Rock Creek, beyond
Whose whispering waters reared Wolf Hill.

The left
Bent Westward, even to Round Top, on whose slope
More blue battalions made a crescent, marked
In sombre outlines. With the dark there came
The Third and Twelfth corps, and ere night had
reached

Its turning, Meade arrived upon the field,
Quickly in order of battle placing all
The troops at his command. Upon the right
Was Slocum with the Twelfth.

The Third and Fifth,
With Sickles in their forefront, held the left;
While at the centre Hancock, like a rock,
Stood at the head of all that war had left
Of the brave First and Second. Howard, too,
With the Eleventh, kept a line compact,
Ready to shift at need to either wing.
Along the crest of Cemetery Hill
A hundred Union guns, in grim array,
Looked down upon the field.

The morning broke,
Yet those two silent hosts no movement made,
But, like opposing lions, couchant, glared
Each in the other's eyes. The morning sped
To noontide, and the field was silent still;
The noon, in shimmering heat, gave place to all
The languor of a Summer afternoon;
Yet no gun spoke. And Meade, who knew full well

The strength of his position, waited still
The coming of the foe.

“They must attack;
Be ready when they come.” So said the keen
And ever cautious Meade. Then, as the day
Wore on to longer shadows, suddenly
A virulent mile of fire leaped into life
Along the rebel line. The maddening roar
Of field artillery, the answering scream
Of hurtling shells, rended the Summer air;
And from the skirts of Cemetery Hill
A rain of iron death implacably
Poured on the ranks of gray.

Then came the yell,—
The Southern yell which fired the Southern blood,—
And, sweeping in mad charge, the regiments,
Brigades, divisions, dashed against the storm
Of grape and canister, which never ceased
Their awful hail of hell.

Up to the guns
The withering gray lines pushed themselves, and like
Sun-stricken snow, melted to nothingness.

The Federal gunners by the hundreds fell
Beside their pieces, but yet others came
To serve the guns and die.

Again, again,
The rebel hosts were shattered and hurled back;
The men in blue across their piled-up dead
Loaded and fired and fell. Yet onward came
The Southern thousands, while, stern man to man,
American fought with American,
Acrid, unyielding, strong!

Across the fields
Pressed Longstreet, Pickett, Hood, McLaws and Heth,
Dashing their legions against Hancock's ranks,
Upreared like rocks that balked a seething sea.
And Hancock, wounded, through his anguish laughed,
As to the muzzles of our batteries
The graybacks fought their way, and still were struck
Down to the sodden earth by loyal arms.
Now Sickles from the front was borne away
Desperately wounded, and as victory seemed
Hung in the balance, Sedgwick's gallant corps,
Weary with marching but undaunted still,

Swept like an avalanche upon the field,
Crushing the foe back on his crumbling lines.
Now upon Slocum on the right there came
A sudden dash by Early; but again
The Northern veterans, like giants, hurled
Rebellion back and triumphed.

So the day,—
The bloody second day of Gettysburg,—
Drew to its awful close; and on the field
Unnumbered thousands lay in hideous heaps,—
The dead and dying,—in a mute appeal
To human dread and pity.

With the dawn
Again the guns of Longstreet roared abroad
Their challenge of defiance, and again
The blue lines swung to action. Slocum rushed
With splendid vigor upon Early; Sykes
Pushed his division up, and Humphreys' corps
Swooped upon Stonewall Jackson's men, who soon
Were driven backward. But ere yet the day
Had ripened to its fulness, all at once
Lee hurled the whole strength of his army straight

On Cemetery Hill. His hundred guns
Poured their concentric fire upon the massed
And wearied blue battalions. Through the air
The riven rocks and upturned earth were hurled;
The trees went down before that blast, and men
And horses fell about their guns. Then came
The answering artillery, till far
Across the green miles of the ruined farms
The echoes shrieked of war.

Now Pickett charged
In mad abandon on our infantry
Along the road which led to Emmettsburg;
And Gibbon with his Second Corps stood fast,
Waiting the impact. "Hold your fire," he cried.
"They're not yet near enough." And even as
He spoke, the rebel steel flashed in the sun
Close to our rifle-pits. "Now fire." A blaze
Of death flamed down the line,—the long, curved
line,—

Of that brave Second Corps; and Pickett's men
Reeled, shattered, back to waiting death, and broke
In wild confusion. Those who in retreat

Saw but the end of all, threw down their arms,
Surrendering by the thousands. Then there came
A panic spreading through the Southern host;
Whole regiments surrendered. On the field,
Amid the dead and dying, lay the arms
Discarded by defeated men, who chose
Surrender as a welcome refuge.

Thus

Was fought and won the bloodiest battle known
In all the records of this Western world;
And as the remnants of Lee's army crossed
Once more the wide Potomac, in his soul
He must have heard the knell of Southern hopes,
Even as the elated hearts of loyalists
Acclaimed fruition in acclaiming Meade.

VI

In bleak November, standing on that field
Heroic in the annals of the world,
A patriot spoke the words of prophecy,
A prophet worshiped at his country's shrine.

And as across the dim dismantled farms
Chill Autumn sighed, the unremembering winds
Bore on their wings the message of a seer
To the remembering years:

“Our fathers here,
Four score and seven years ago, brought forth
A Nation new, conceived in liberty,
And dedicated to the truth that all
Men are created equal. Now we wage
A mighty civil war, to test the strength
Of such a Nation. On this battlefield
We meet to dedicate a resting place
For those who here gave up their lives that we
Might, as a living people, still endure.
Our act is fit; but in a larger sense
We cannot consecrate or hallow ground
Already hallowed by the imperial dead,—
They who in struggling here have set their deeds
So far above our praising. 'Tis for us
To dedicate to the unfinished work
Ourselves, in dear devotion to the dead,—
Heroic souls who in a holy cause

Gave the last measure of a patriot's love.
Let us find here our duty. Let us here
Highly resolve that they who on this field
Breathed out their lives, shall not have died in vain,—
That our loved Nation, under God, shall have
New birth of freedom, and that government
Of, by, and for the people, shall not cease
Or perish from the earth.”

And Lincoln's voice,
In tones which told of tears, became the wraith
Of music falling off along the breeze,—
A melody to fill the souls of men,
Wrapt in the mantle of the silences.

BOOK SIXTH

BOOK SIXTH

I

Vicksburg and Gettysburg! How thrill the names
Within the porches of the ears long strained
To catch the first notes of victorious peace!
Till now hope long deferred had sickened hearts
Filled with the love of home and native land;
Till now a fratricidal contest brought
Results but indecisive. But at last
Men knew the tide had turned; for Grant and Meade,
Hurling rebellion back to feed its spleen
Upon the offal of its own chagrin,
Set bounds forever to the onward sweep
Of Lee, whose boast had been that Southern steel
Should sweep the spoil of Pennsylvania farms,—
A boast well amplified by threats which fell
From the thin lips of Davis, grown apace
In insolence and malice. “Soon,” he cried,

“We'll carry war where sword and torch may glut
Their appetite within the densely packed
Great cities of the North.”

But Fate, that holds
A scale whose dipping no man may foresee,
Ruled otherwise. With Vicksburg captured, all
The taint of treason that had soiled the air
Where the great Mississippi seeks the sea,
Was blown away, and rebel territory
Severed in twain forever. In the West
Rebellion's power was broken. In the ranks
Of a free Nation's army now there served
A hundred thousand freedmen, whose dark skins
No longer bore the brand of slavery,
And in whose hearts dwelt gratitude, and all
The new lit fires of liberty. Then came
“The Rock of Chickamauga,”—Thomas,—brave
To save an army, and snatch victory's flower
From shadows of defeat. Grant, silent, stern,
Assumed command at Louisville, and brought
The tempered power of an iron will
To render action vital. Up the heights

Of Lookout Mountain Sherman's forces charged,
And from the end of Missionary Ridge
Hurled down destruction on a fleeing foe.
Hooker, impetuous, drove the Southern host
Far up the western slope, and through the woods
Sent scurrying, panic struck, the broken ranks
Of rebel regiments. The next day saw
The army of the Cumberland assail
The field works grouped on Missionary Ridge,
And at the bayonet point sweep out the men
Who, under Bragg, had fought in gallant style
To save a waning cause. To Tunnel Hill
The dauntless Thomas now pursued and fought
Again the harassed Bragg, while Burnside met
And, with the help of Sherman, backward turned
The men of Longstreet, who in swift retreat
Seeking Virginia, left Tennessee
In full possession of the Union arms.
Thus came relief to those enduring souls
Whose loyalty no persecution balked,
When in the mountains of their Western homes
They dwelt without protection from the land
Whose flag they dearly loved.

And Lincoln saw
As in a glass of fate the glimmering dawn
Spread, like a hint of coming joy, across
The silent slumbering hills. A prescience filled
The chambers of his brain, and through his dreams
Wove pictures, haply born mysteriously
In that large spiritual nature,—knit perchance
Into the fabric of to-day's events,
Even as the imagination of a seer
Colors all prophecy to make it real.
"I have a dream that comes and comes again,
Asleep or waking,—in the night, the day,—
I know not whence it comes, or what should bode
Its strange persistence and the vividness
Of its appearing. It is of a ship,
With canvas set and bellying in the wind,—
A ship fast sailing to an unknown port,—
Freighted with hope; with helm held hard and bow
Leaping across the foam."

So spoke the man
Whose rugged hand guided the ship of State,—
Whose human heart bled with a people's woes
And bore a Nation's burden.

II

Onward swept
The tide of victory. Yet no great deed
Reaches fruition unalloyed of toil
And sweat of bended brows.

The call went forth
For men to carry forward to the end
The country's vital struggle, and so crush
Into the ashes of its baleful fires
Rebellion's hateful form. The draft became
The unavoidable recourse of war,
And States and people bowed, save in New York
Whose unavailing riots did but blot
The 'scutcheon of a city, proud and rich
Yet swarming with the men of foreign birth
And fire-bred fugitives from a rebel South,
Who had not learned the patriot's creed. To these
Were joined that horde of coward souls whose name,
The "Copperheads," sounded in honest ears
Like some fell serpent's hiss,—beings too mean
To venture worthless lives in any cause,

Yet prone to blatant mouthings safe at home,
And, like assassins crawling in the dark,
Seeking to stab a mother in the back,
The while they shared her bounty.

But the wheels
Of destiny could not be blocked by hate,
Nor Freedom's cause be thwarted of its goal;
And as Time turned the page, another year
Saw a united North more firmly set,—
More solidly determined than before,—
To save the Union and forever blot
Treason and slavery from the records marred
By blood-stained fingers.

Now the time was ripe
To incorporate in the fundamental law
The prohibition of the right to hold
Black men in bondage, throughout all the length
Of a land dedicate to liberty.
So was Emancipation made complete,
And so was Lincoln justified.

Meanwhile
Grant, called to the Potomac, came to take

Into his vigorous hands the threads left loose
By Meade, who faltered on the heels of fate,
And, after victory gloriously won,
Failed strangely to crush Lee, who crossed again
The broad Potomac to his former lines.
Upon the soil of old Virginia stood
The ranks of long opposing armies, each
Seasoned to war's mutations. Grant and Lee
At last were face to face; the hero one
Of Vicksburg and the storied Western fields;
The hope the other of a militant South,
Weakened but still unconquered.

As the Spring
Ripened to Summer, came the clash of steel,—
The rending of the air with deadly fire.
The Rapidan was crossed, and followed fast
The bloody battles of the Wilderness.
At Opequan the gallant Sheridan
Drove Early from the field, and following
Even to the Blue Ridge passes, ravaged all
The fruitful valley, leaving desolate
The one time smiling fields. But Early crossed

Again the mountains, and the Federal troops,
Retreating in confusion, made a stand
At Middletown, from whence the voice of guns
Reached Sheridan at Winchester.

Like light

He rode in furious haste, and to the field
Brought such magnetic presence as inspired
Each man with double courage, and insured
The quick repulse of Early, who was fain
To flee with broken ranks.

So came the end

Of war in Shenandoah Valley; so
Rose to the stature of a hero he
Whose sobriquet became a shibboleth:
"Cavalry Sheridan."

Now Sherman drew
His lines about Atlanta. Towards the sea
He bent his soldierly, adventurous eyes.
"We cannot stay," so wrote the hero of historic deeds,
"Upon the mere defensive. I prefer
To make a wreck of roads and country here,
From Chattanooga to Atlanta, then

Send back my wounded, and through Georgia move
With an effective army to the sea.
War, which is hell, cannot be delicate;
I must move, smashing all things, to the sea.”
And Grant, more cautious, yet demurred, but soon
Gave Sherman all his will, and Sherman cast
His fortunes in the balance, cutting all
Communications in his rear, and so
Marched onward to the sea.

Then Farragut,
While thus the Union arms on land bore high
A laureled victory, seized upon Mobile,
His vessels sweeping down, unmindful how
Torpedoes barred the way. Thus history grew
Into romance, and on Time's tablets wrote
The record of imperishable deeds.

III

Amid the roar of war is heard the voice
Of civic duty, calling through the land
The approaching termination of the rule

Of him on whom the people set their hopes,—
Of him whose heart the people knew was true,—
Whose staunch integrity and loyal faith
No one could call in question. East and West
The stern demand was made that none but he
Should be entrusted with the Nation's fate,—
That none but he should consummate the work
Begun by him and by his wisdom brought
In sight of fair fruition. Some there were,
Inspired by ignorance, envy, or the zeal
Which ever advocates a change, who strove
To nominate some stranger to lead on
The hosts of Union to the wished-for end.
Such men as Greeley, honest in intent,
But easily beguiled, and overfond
Of lending ear to his own vain conceits,
Puffed with a reputation grown beyond
The sum of his deserts. Such men as Chase,
Disloyal to his chief, while doubtless true
To what he deemed the right. Such as Fremont,
Hot-headed in a righteous cause, but prone
To strangle prudence with publicity.

These men and many more made argument
Against renomination of the man
To whose sagacity and splendid zeal
The Nation owed its life. But all in vain
The opposition strove to drown the call
Of a free people for the trusted chief
Who dwelt within the hearts of all who held
Country above ambition.

Thus the choice
Fell once again on Lincoln. Once again
He stood upon the Eastern portico,
Where, in the mists of a departed hour,
He plead for peace, and, holding forth gaunt hands,
Implored his wayward countrymen to pause.
They heeded not, but, answering with jeers,
Plunged into battle, proud and arrogant,
Full of the overconfidence which breeds
The seeds of its undoing.

Through the stress,
The awful murderous stress, of those four years,
America had agonized, and care
Had writ deep lines on Lincoln's homely face.

The maddened South had driven deep its crime
Into its own torn entrails, and to-day
Stood, like a desolated temple, reft
Of all that once was beauty.

From the throng
Now burst a mighty cheer; from throats grown dry
With fever came the faint pathetic note
Of those whom weeks in crowded hospitals
Had left but wrecks of men.

On crutches came
Hundreds of soldiers, maimed, to serve the cause
And fight the fight of freedom; and anon
An eager light stole piteously athwart
The faded eyes of men who soon must die
Of dread disease of camp and swampy field,
Who yet would die the happier to have seen
The saviour of his country.

Lifting up
His face, whereon emotion lambent played,
Lincoln made sign for silence, and his lips
Uttered the message that was half a prayer.
He showed the purposes which rashly led

The insurgents into action; how at first
The government sought but to set due bounds
To slavery's extension,—not at all
To banish it; how, by their own mad act,
The people of the South had forced the end
Of slavery forever.

“Ah!” he cried,
“The Almighty's purposes are all His own.
Woe to the world because offences come.
Offences needs must come, but woe to him
By whom the wrong is wrought. Shall we suppose
That slavery, which haply needs must come,
Hath brought the woe of war to North and South?
Fondly we hope, as fervently we pray,
That this grim scourge of war may pass away;
Yet if God wills that it continue till
The wealth piled up by all the centuries
Of unrequited labor shall be sunk,—
Till every drop of blood drawn by the lash
Shall be repaid by one drawn by the sword,—
So still it must be said, as 'twas of yore,
The judgments of the Lord are ever true
And righteous altogether.”

Then in tears,
Vibrant with all the passion of a seer:
"With malice," spoke the prophet, "towards none;
With charity for all; with firmness in
The right, as God gives us to see the right,
Let us complete the work that we are in."
When he had ended, the upswelling cheer
That rose, fell off to silence, checked by awe
Too deep for human bearing; and adown
The gusty colonnades and broad arcades
Of the vast capitol, an echo rang
Heard yet to-day: "With charity for all."

IV

Yea, and the time made bitter call for all
The strength of human wills, to keep the faith
With scorned humanity's most stern commands.
From Libby Prison came the rending cry
Of Union soldiers, scourged to tasks, and galled
With chains more bitter than the clutch of death.
The outraged face of Mercy turned away
From all the horrors of Fort Pillow; while

At Andersonville carnival went on
To please the bloody fancies of a fiend.
Then in the Senate rose the sturdy Wade,
Demanding that retaliation be
Forthwith resorted to. But Sumner's voice
Was firm for righteousness. And Lincoln spoke,
Out of his human heart, those words of gold:
"I cannot starve and murder men, though all
The malice of our foes should goad us on.
Two wrongs have never made a right, and we
Must follow conscience even to the end."

Now, as the glimmerings of coming peace
Greeted to dawn, the mind of Lincoln dwelt
On reconstruction of the edifice
So rudely shocked by war. The Union stood,
Yet from a smoking, desolated South
Came glimpses but of ruin. Every State
Still in rebellion must be organized
Under a new and loyal government.
Obedience first, then restoration to
The rights of citizenship, and once again

Admission to the councils of the land.
The mighty task which now a mighty mind
Essayed to carry to completion, was
The rearing of the torn Republic's fane,
The restoration of a temple fair
In all its pristine beauty.

Yet once more
There came the call to battle. Lee was camped
Beside the Appomattox, while there drew
An ever closing circle of blue ranks,
Upon whose banners victory sat to cheer
Each loyal soul to action. Grant was there,
Silent and confident, his veterans
Eager to make an ending of the foe.
Sherman, whose lines of eighty thousand men
Sought but to form the junction which should force
All opposition down, watched eagerly
The coming of the end; while Sheridan,
Earnest, alert and rapid, marched to seize
Lee's only avenue of exit. Thus
A fustian Confederacy was brought
To its last gasp of life. Lee, ever brave,

Held out, but warned his chief that Petersburg
And Richmond too must fall.

Then Davis fled,
A pitiable object, symbol fit
Of treason decked in fear's habiliments;
And at the dawning of another day
The Union cavalry possession took
Of Richmond, and upon the state-house raised
Once more the old flag,—the unsullied stars
And waving stripes of freedom.

But for Grant
A greater goal lured onward. Then and there
He vowed to "end the matter." Pushing on
Up one side of the Appomattox, Ord,
Leading the valiant army of the James;
Grant on the other, and with Sheridan
Scouring the ground in front, no hope was left
For the intrepid Lee. Through weary years
He had endured the grinding strains of war,
And in a cause unrighteous ever held
The path of righteous action. Now he saw
The inevitable end, and, stung to tears,

Bore manly sorrows with a dignity
Befitting manhood in its best estate.
Yielding to Grant his sword, he bore away
The fragrance of a character unstained,
The while his conqueror, large-hearted, broad,
Gave generous terms, exacting naught that held
The savor of dishonor.

So the sun
Which shone on Appomattox, lit the fires
Of patriot exultation, for all knew
Rebellion died upon that April day,
And once again the Union was supreme.
Meanwhile, the patient Lincoln, lifting eyes
Of thankfulness to that Almighty power
Whose presence was his bulwark, came to tread
The dreary streets of Richmond, looking long
Upon the walls of Libby and the marks
Of desolation and the finger-prints
Of bloody-handed war.

The negroes flocked
To see him, hear him speak, haply to touch
His garments who, like a Messiah, came,

Bringing deliverance and the gift of life;
Kissing the hand whose act had set them free,
Blessing the saviour whose redemption brought
The life of liberty to souls long crushed
Beneath the weight of serfdom.

Through the North,—
The iron-willed, indomitable North,—
Ran the electric joy, the deep content
That comes of great accomplishment.

The land
Once more was liberty's, once more was free
And dedicate to justice. From the South
The sound of crumbling armies, like a dirge,
Came fitful on the balmy winds of Spring;
And echoes of dire desolation died
Amid the anthem chords of victory.

V

Ring out, ye bells!
From factory, tower and steeple,
Ye bells that call to daily toil

The thews and sinews of a mighty people;
Ye bells whose long, reverberant echo swells
Through lattices where moss and ivy coil
Cool fingers mid the stones;
Ye bells that utter the muezzin call
Translated to the language of the Christ;
Ring out in ecstasy to one and all
Peace, whose soft touch forever hath sufficed
To silence sorrow's moans.

Oh! Mother-Land, how agonized have been
The torture and the travail of thy days!
What hideous sights thine outraged eyes have seen!
What blood hath smeared the verdure of thy bays!
And 'mid thy laurel the commingled rue
Hath spread the gloom of a funereal shade,
Till thou, whose lips were fashioned to command,
Hast, of thy mother-love, been forced to sue,
Lest thine infuriate children, undismayed,
Should drench a sorrowing land
With one another's blood. How from thy view
Have patriots passed to judgment! How

Have they held high their colors and gone down
In glorious pageantry of mailed death!
Alas! that for the crime of slavery thou
Shouldst be condemned to wear a martyr's crown,
Listening with bated breath
To the long roll-call of thy martial dead!
Yet is the end accomplished. Even now,
'Mid the low requiem of thy muffled drums,
A deep exultant cry,
Born on the rounded lips of Victory, comes,—
Life's music woven through a threnody,
Like an immortal joy!
War is a spectre fled;
Rebellion, as a dragon in the throes
Of a last agony, through all the South
Lashes the dust of desolation's woes,
And from its fetid mouth
Spits forth the poison fated to destroy
Itself in its own infamy.
At Appomattox the strong hand of Grant
Crushed out the life of treason. Gallant Lee
Surrendered with his legions the last plea

For human bondage and the right of States
To sovereignty supreme. Now at the gates
Of a free Nation's capital we plant,
Unsullied still, the free flag of the people.
So ring out, ye bells!
From factory, tower and steeple
The victory whose echo proudly swells;
And, as the dissonant war-cries slowly cease,
Far over suncapped hills and greening dells
Fling forth your word of peace.

Yet toll, ye bells!
Down all the arches of the lonesome sky
Pour forth the message of a murdered joy!
And even as the victor's song foretells
Peace that nor hate nor malice may destroy,
Weave through the cadence, as it upward swells,
The echo of a long heart-broken sigh
Wrung from an anguished people.
Toll, ye bells, from factory, tower and steeple,
In tones made eloquent of garnered woe,

Divinely fashioned by the hand of Grief,
Utter the sadness which they only know
Whose every flower is plucked from sorrow's sheaf;
For he is dead who loved his country so,—
Our leader and our chief!

With new light dawning in his saddened eyes,
With new joy in his ever steadfast soul,
Lincoln the patriot saw at last the prize
Gleam with the glory of a patriot's goal.
And even in that moment crafty death
Stole on him in a murderous madman's guise,
And he who saved a Nation, in a breath
Was one with God's immensities.
Ah, Fate inscrutable! Was there no life
Other than his to yield itself to thee?
Was there no other heart to still its strife
And end its being at thy stern decree?
Dear God! That he who bore a people's woes,—
A man of sorrows bending 'neath his cross,—
Should, at the moment of his blest release
From the deep anguish which a patriot knows

In presence of his bleeding country's loss,
Meet death's dark midnight at the dawn of peace,—
Endure the thorns amid the bitter dross,
Yet miss at last the rapture of the rose.

Then toll, sad bells!
In falling minor tones o'er sun-kissed fields,
In dying strains far over dreamy hills,
Through all the pulsing life of cities, bent
Upon the rich rewards which effort yields,
O'er trodden street and meadow flower besprent,
Sound the despair which, like a requiem, stills
The song of exultation, and dispels
The flush that victory lent.

Toll, solemn bells!
Through dim vanished years
We seem to catch the echo of your tones,
And standing where no note of discord mars
The melody of life, to hear the moans,—
The piteous drip of tears,—
Preluding Victory's pæan, which foretells
Immortal music sung among the stars.



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